INDIA

HISTORY AND TREASURES OF AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION

Text by
MARIA ANGELILLO

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To grasp the dynamic nature and volatile essence of ancient India, whose continuity and vitality are a constant source of wonder and fascination, requires a familiarity with the history and culture of one of the world's oldest civilizations. This book presents a chronological picture of Indian history from 2500 BC to AD 1192 – from the dawn of Indian culture, represented by the Indus Valley Civilization, until the defeat of Prithviraj's Rajput army at Tarain by the Islamic warriors of Muhammad of Ghur. Tarain was one of the decisive battles in Indian history, marking the advent of Muslim rule over large areas of the sub-continent. The author places the most familiar – and sometimes also misunderstood – aspects of Indian culture in their historical and cultural context, making them easily understood by the non-specialist reader. Ancient India was the scene of the birth and development of some of the most distinctive features of Indian culture and identity, such as the three great native religious traditions of the ancient period (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism), and the caste system, aspects which are discussed in detail. The rich array of photographs, combined with an analytical yet straightforward text, present a picture that restores the vital beauty of India, a country that never ceases to enchant our eyes, souls and minds.

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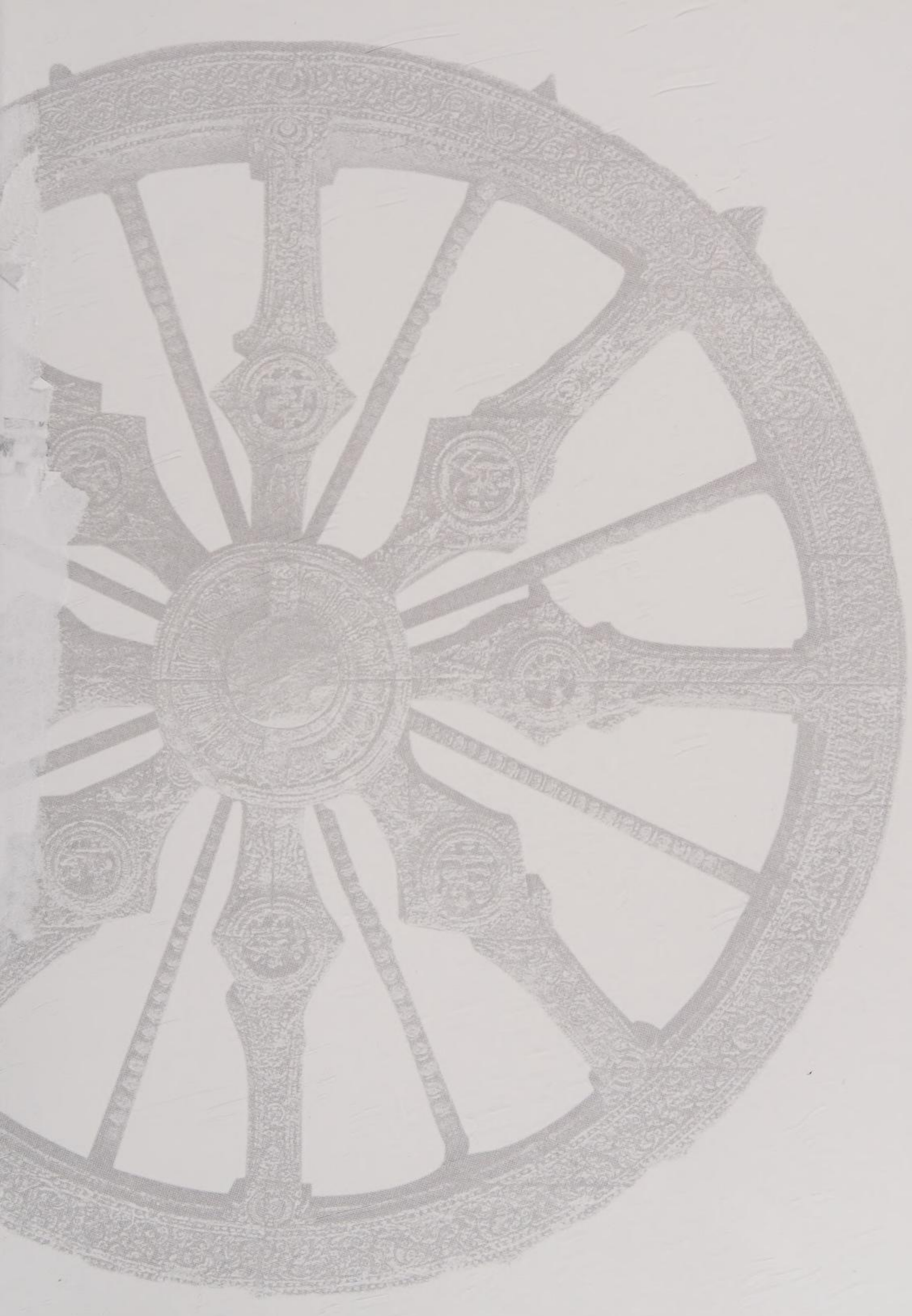

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
PAGE 12

THE BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN CULTURE: THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION
PAGE 24

THE FIRST IMPERIAL UNIFICATION AND ITS BREAKUP
PAGE 64

THE INDIAN MIDDLE AGES
PAGE 148

CHRONOLOGY
PAGE 17

THE ARYANS AND THE FORMATION OF THE EARLIEST KINGDOMS
PAGE 40

THE GUPTA EMPIRE
PAGE 106

INDEX - BIBLIOGRAPHY
PAGE 204

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1 - Vishnu surrounded by his avatars (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston).

2-3 - This statue from Khajuraho depicts a lion attacked by a prince.

4-5 - The monoliths at Mahabalipuram date from the 7th century AD.

6 and 7 - This statuette depicts Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Dance (British Museum, London).

8-9 - Heavenly nymphs adorn the façade of the temple of Kandariya Mahadeva at Khajuraho.

INTRODUCTION

The history of ancient India encompasses a geographical area far larger than that occupied by the modern-day Republic of India; it also included Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal and the island of Sri Lanka. This huge region, referred to as the Indian subcontinent, covers an area of 1,750,000 sq. miles (4,532,479 sq. km) and embraces the most diverse terrain, climate, geology and landscapes, from rainforests to arid deserts. It is possible to distinguish three main geographic regions: the mountainous northern belt formed by the Himalayas, the Indo-Gangetic alluvial plains, and the Deccan peninsular massif in the south.

The earliest known civilization in this immense and varied territory dates back to prehistoric times and is known as the Indus Valley civilization, owing to its location. This highly developed urban society and culture and its sudden, mysterious disappearance make India a source of wonder and fascination even at the very dawn of its history. The name with which the West has always referred to the country is also derived from the Indus River. However, its Sanskrit name comes not from a watercourse, but from a mythical ancestor, Bharat, descended from a heavenly nymph.

The epic of the extraordinary Indian civilization continues with the first of a long series of invaders of the subcontinent: the Aryans, whose presence, like that of the subsequent conquerors, enriched the native cultural models and merged with them to produce works of unrivaled sophistication. The complex picture of ancient Indian history is completed by the allure of the great imperial dynasties and the splendor of the medieval kingdoms, marked by forceful intellectual and philosophical progress and incomparable artistic production. The historical account presented in this book ends in the 12th century AD, immediately prior to the start of Muslim rule over large areas of India, inaugurated by the second battle of Tarain in 1192, when the Islamic warriors of Muhammad of Ghur defeated a confederation of Rajput princes led by Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi.

Ancient India was the birthplace of three of the world's main religions: Buddhism, Jainism and Sanatana Dharma, literally the "Eternal Way," known to Westerners as Hinduism. The Indian intellect not only applied itself enthusiastically to the investigation of the transcendental and the laws that govern in humans the coexistence of sorrow and happiness, but also passionately cultivated the sciences, making important breakthroughs, such as the elevation of zero to the status of number. The history of India is expressed in a lively dialogue between artistic traditions, philosophical and religious conceptions and political and social dynamics.

The artistic heritage handed down to us from ancient India consists largely – with the partial exception of the Indus Valley civilization – of works essentially oriented toward worship and meditation. Indeed, while secular art is well documented in literature, it has not survived, chiefly due to the perishable nature of the materials used for its creation. The repeated forays and invasions that scourged northern India and its monuments, which often fell prey to the iconoclastic fury or blind greed of invaders, have further depleted the nonetheless magnificent artistic heritage. The mystical and philosophical concepts underlying the three native religious currents converge and are expressed in India's artistic production. The works are enriched with influences deriving from the encounter with foreign peoples – often in the form of clashes – and are integrated with regional and local variations. The history of the surprising cultural continuity of the Indian world, protracted and reasserted over the centuries, is legible in its monuments.

The temple is perhaps the highest and most characteristic expression of the history of Indian art, representing the supreme synthesis of mathematical, geometric and astronomical knowledge and the different artistic experiences.

11 - This sculpture of Tara with three heads, with a Buddha on each, represents the Mother of Compassion, a very important figure in Mahayana Buddhism (National Museum of India, New Delhi).

13 - This niche in the temple of Surya houses a fine statue of the god Ganesha, whose prominent belly is an auspicious symbol of wealth and prosperity.

The proportions, decoration and arrangement of the temple encapsulate a very rich system of symbols, aimed at defining the identity of the macrocosm, the microcosm and the divine. The well-established iconography of the shrine refers to the dictates contained in the elaborate tradition of the *Shilpa-shastras* (treatises on applied arts), which establish the ways of conveying metaphysical and cosmogonical contents in sculptural forms of breathtaking beauty and harmony. Indeed, the goal pursed by Indian artists is not the representation of immediately perceptible ephemeral reality, but the expression of absolute transcendent concepts.

One of the peculiar features of Indian art is the preeminence accorded to works and their use over all aspects of value and individuality of the artists involved in their creation. Indeed, the individuality and biography of their creators are normally unknown, corresponding to a notion of the artist as more of a craftsman, who is not required to apply creative innovation to the contents and means of expression of his work, but rather to provide the perfection, skill and devotion used to reproduce the iconography and forms attested by tradition. The key feature – effectively depicted in iconographic cycles and recounted in mythology – that guides and characterizes the unraveling of Indian history is unity in diversity, in the light of which the lacerations of contemporary India appear even more strident and meaningless.

14 - This sculptural group depicts the divine couple formed by Shiva and his consort Parvati (Renzo Freschi Oriental Art, Milan).

15 - This northern Indian sandstone statue (12th century) depicts a man armed with a sword, probably a Kshatriya (John Eskenazi Ltd., London).

BAMIYAN

BACTRIA

GANDHARA

KABUL

TAXILA

LAHORE

HARAPPA

HIMALAYAS

BRAHMAPUTRA

INDUS

KALIBANGAN

KOT DIJI

DELHI

MOHENJO DARO

OSIAN

AMRI

MATHURA

ALLAHABAD

PATALIPUTRA

KARACHI

MOUNT ABU

JAGAT

KHAJURAHO

SARNATH

GANGES

DEOGARH

BHARHUT

MODHERA

LOMAS RISHI

SANCHI

KOLKATA

LOTHAL

NARMADA

BHIMBETKA

BHUBANESHWAR

UDAYAGIRI

KONARAK

ARABIAN SEA

AJANTA

PURI

BAY OF BENGAL

ELLORA

AURANGABAD

MUMBAI

KARLA

GODAVARI

ELEPHANTA

BHAJA

AMARAVATI

KRISHNA

INDIAN OCEAN

AIHOLE

PATTADAKAL

ALAMPUR

BADAMI

CHENNAI

KANCHIPURAM

MAHABALIPURAM

CHIDAMBARAM

GANGAIKONDACOLAPURAM

DARASURAM

KUMBAKONAM

NARTAMALAI

TANJORE

SRI LANKA

18-19 - This photograph shows a reproduction by Sarkis Katchadourian of a wall painting in Cave 1 at Ajanta.

20-21 - The base of the temple of Surya at Konarak represents a processional chariot drawn by seven sculpted horses. The huge wheels are intricately carved, down to the tiniest details of the hub and the spokes.

22-23 - This relief depicts a young naga emerging from the jaws of a *makara*: both are associated, in different ways, with the element of water (Government Museum, Mathura).

THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION
(2500-1800 BC)

The Indus Valley civilization was the expression of an advanced urban culture, whose settlements were scattered along the banks of the middle course of the Indus River and the now dry Sarasvati River. The civilization reached its height between 2300 and 1800 BC, but subsequently started to break down around 1750 BC. This phase of decline is characterized by the Jhukar and Jhangar cultures and lasted until its definitive disappearance some time before 1500 BC. The two nerve centers of the Indus Valley civilization were probably the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, whose urban plans are amazingly refined and uniform. The people of the Indus Valley civilization were engaged in agriculture and flourishing trade, probably also with the contemporary Mesopotamian civilization. The form of government, religious worship, writing and the causes of the end of the civilization all remain unknown.

THE ARYANS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE EARLIEST KINGDOMS
(1800-322 BC)

Around 1800 BC nomadic groups originating on the plains north of the Caucasus between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea entered the Indian subcontinent. The Aryans were an aggregation of nomadic tribes devoted mainly to herding and distinguished by their use of horses, iron, copper and bronze implements, and spoked wheels. Until 1000 BC Aryan society remained tribal and pre-urban, characterized by the gradual evolution from herding and nomadism to a sedentary life based on agriculture and the internal stratification of society. Around 1000 BC the Aryan settlements moved to the upper and middle Ganges Valley, giving rise to a thriving new urban civilization. Towards 500 BC Magadha became the political center of northern India, and both Buddhism and Jainism emerged during the same period.

THE MAURYAN EMPIRE AND ITS BREAKUP
(322 BC-AD 320)

The first Indian empire was founded around 320 BC by Chandragupta Maurya. It was a strongly centralized state based on an extensive civil and military bureaucracy. The most celebrated emperor of the dynasty was Ashoka I. However, following his death in 233 BC, the Mauryan empire fell into a final and irresistible decline that continued until 184 BC, when it was supplanted by the Shunga dynasty. The breakup of the Mauryan empire led to a new influx of invaders – Indo-Greeks, Shakas and Kushans – in the northeastern regions from the 2nd century BC. During the period of the Mauryan empire stone started to be employed in the fields of sculpture and architecture and its use soon became widespread. One of the leading cultural centers of central and southern India was Amaravati, ruled by the Satavahana dynasty.

THE GUPTA EMPIRE
(320 BC-AD 510)

Following the Mauryan empire, the second dominant power of northern India was the Gupta dynasty, whose empire was established by Chandragupta I and subsequently extended in two stages by Samudragupta (AD 335-375) and Chandragupta II (AD 375-415). The years between the ascent to the throne of Chandragupta I and the defeat of the Gupta army at Eran by central Asian invaders coincide with the period of greatest splendor of Indian art and culture. All the arts and sciences flourished, from literature to architecture, astronomy and medicine. The earliest stone temples were built and the Vakataka dynasty commissioned the wall paintings of Ajanta. From a social point of view, the caste system became entrenched and the conditions of non-caste members were aggravated.

THE INDIAN MIDDLE AGES (AD 510-1192)

The final attempt at reuniting northern India, prior to its medieval fragmentation into a series of constantly warring kingdoms and the consequent political instability, was made by Harshavardhana (AD 606-646). From the 6th century the process of donating land to royal officials, military leaders and Brahmans – principally due to the shortage of liquid funds – assumed a distinctly feudal nature. However, the deurbanization and decline in trade experienced in the northern part of the country contrasts strongly with the vitality of the central and southern regions, which displayed great religious and cultural vivacity and considerable intellectual dynamism. The extremely fragmented political structure of the country encouraged an extraordinary blossoming of architectural styles, and the artistic culmination of the period is represented by the Hindu temples of Khajuraho, the Jain temple complex of Mount Abu and the temples at Konarak and Bhubaneshwar.

1

THE BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN CULTURE: THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (2500 - 1800 BC)

The Origins
page 26

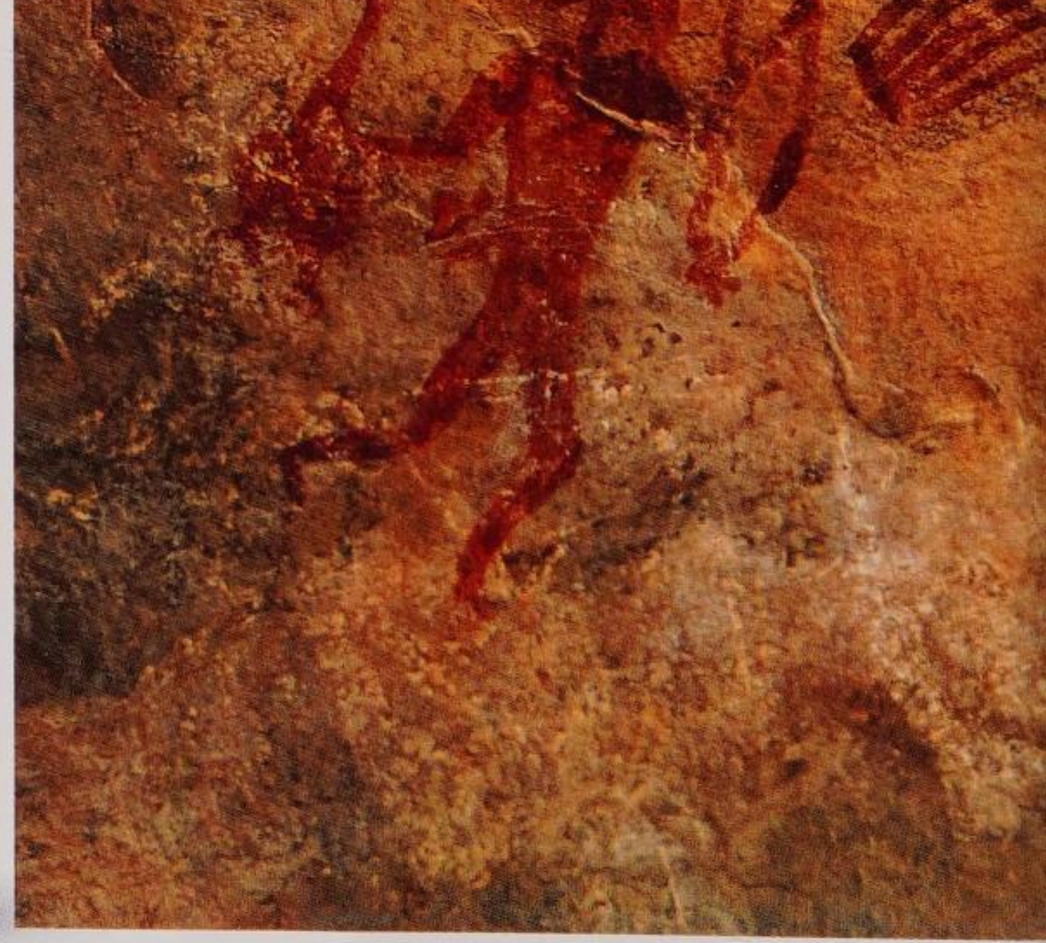
Indus Valley Civilization
page 28

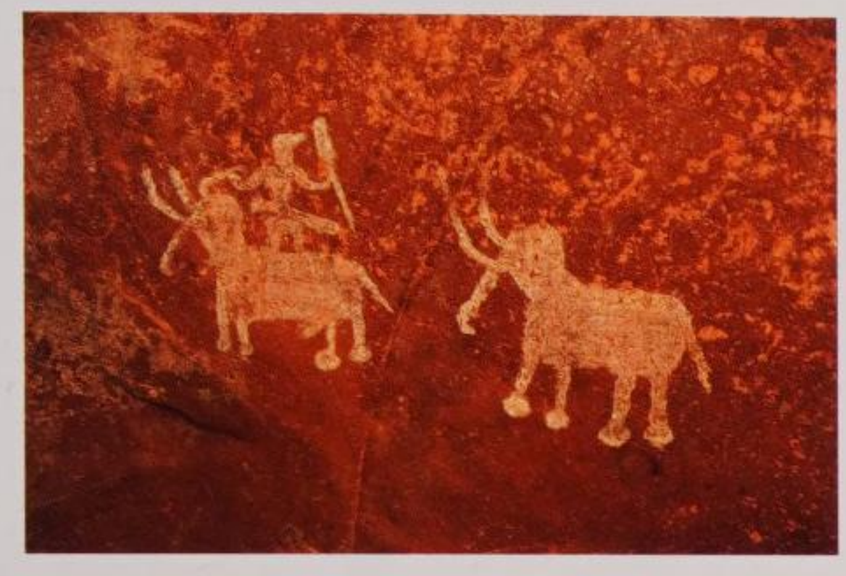
Art and the Cities of the Indus Valley
page 32

THE ORIGINS

The earliest surviving traces of human presence in India date from the Paleolithic period and consist of fragments of worked stone found along the course of the Soan River, a minor tributary of the Indus. However, the oldest Indian works of art date from the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods and consist of a series of cave paintings, most of which are located close to the city of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. The most famous site is that of the Bhimbetka rock shelters, 29 miles (47 km) south of Bhopal, which are decorated with scenes of hunting, music and dancing, animal fights, honey gathering and funeral rites. Neolithic sites, which witnessed man's transition from a nomadic to sedentary lifestyle with the first permanent human settlements, are scattered over the subcontinent. One of the earliest of these is Mehrgarh, situated at the foot of the Bolan Pass that connects the Indus Valley to the Iranian plateau via Quetta and Kandahar. The site, whose oldest mound has been dated to the 6th millennium BC, is particularly interesting as it was continuously inhabited for several thousand years and is thus able to recount the gradual evolution from agricultural to urban settlement. Settlements dating from the 6th to the 4th millennium were generally centers of farming and herding activity.

The two hubs around which the artistic production of the period is concentrated are represented by the Nal and Kulli cultures. While the former stands out for the production of polychrome pottery, the use of stone in building and the practice of burying its dead, the latter is characterized by earthenware with black decorative friezes featuring animal and plant motifs, numerous terracotta artifacts including female figurines with particularly sophisticated hairstyles and jewelry, and the practice of cremation. The settlements of Kot Diji and Amri, in which the earliest examples of local pottery appear, were the precursors of the Indus Valley civilization, the most fascinating episode in Indian archaeology.



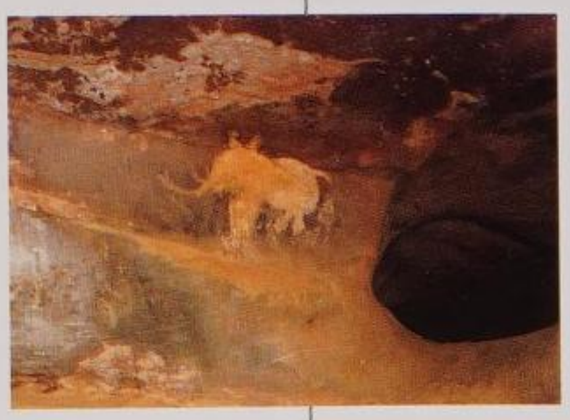


25 - This limestone head from Kalibangan (1500 BC) is believed to depict a religious authority (National Museum of India, New Delhi).

26 left - This pottery vessel from Kalibangan dates from the period between 2300 and 1800 BC (National Museum of India, New Delhi).

26 right - This perforated pottery vessel is from Harappa (Archaeological Museum, Harappa).

26-27 and 27 - The Bhimbetka rock paintings, which adorn over 500 caves, depict scenes of daily life and feature many animal figures.



INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

The discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization not only represents one of the greatest achievements of archaeology, but also played a fundamental role in redefining our knowledge of Indian history. Indeed, it was previously believed that the first great civilization of the subcontinent was the Vedic Indo-Aryan culture, dating from the second millennium BC.

However, from 1853 Sir Alexander Cunningham, the first director of the Indian Archaeological Survey, discovered a series of seals in Harappa, about 150 miles (240 km) southwest of Lahore. John Marshall, the director general of the Indian Archaeological Survey, promoted the first excavations in 1902 but it was not until 1922 that R.D. Banerji, an Indian official of the Survey stumbled upon objects identical to the Harappan artifacts in Mohenjo-daro, 400 miles north of Harappa in the middle Indus basin. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro constitute the two hubs of what became known as the Indus Valley Civilization, although its settlements are not limited to the banks of the middle course of the Indus River, but are spread over a far wider area extending from modern-day Afghanistan to the Ganges Valley and from Alamgirpur in the Himalayan foothills and the outpost of Rupar to Gujarat, an area larger than Western Europe.

Other centers of great historical and artistic importance include Lothal, on the coast of the modern-day state of Gujarat, and Kalibangan, 127 miles (204 km) from Bikaner in northern Rajasthan, on the left bank of the ancient Sarasvati River, which is now dry in all but for its upper course, where it is known as the Ghaggar. It is interesting to stress how most

28-29 - This Harappan bronze chariot demonstrates that the spoked wheel was unknown to the Indus Valley civilization. Indeed, this technological innovation was subsequently introduced to India by the Aryan invaders (Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalay, Mumbai).

29 bottom - The Indus Valley civilization used copper and bronze. Iron was unknown and was subsequently introduced to India by the Aryans. Indeed, the spearheads shown here are made of copper (National Museum of India, New Delhi).

of the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization are located along this dried-up watercourse identified with the mythical Sarasvati River, described in the Rig Veda as "Best Mother, best of Rivers, best of Goddesses" (2.41.16).

Leaving aside the dating problems still involved in its chronology, it can reasonably be claimed that the Indus Valley Civilization reached full maturity between 2300 and 1800 BC. Subsequently, around 1750 BC, it started to break down. This phase of decline is characterized by the Jhukar and Jhangar cultures and lasted until its definitive disappearance some time before 1500 BC.

The Indus Valley civilization was characterized by the use of a written language, which has not yet been deciphered, of which 400 graphical signs have been found in groups of varying numbers each comprising between 4 and 10 elements. A few of these signs have been found on pottery and a much greater number on a group of mysterious objects that has continued to fascinate scholars for decades: the famous square steatite seals, with sides measuring from 0.7 to 1.2 in. (1.8 to 3.04 cm) and a characteristic pierced boss on the back. Around 3,000 of these have been found, most of them at Mohenjo-daro, and it is presumed that they were used to stamp documents and goods. In addition to what are believed to be brief inscriptions, the seals also contain carved images that constitute the most precious and exciting documentation of this civilization to have survived.

The most striking motifs are those featuring one or more animals, particularly unicorns (that were probably sacred as they are always depicted with a caparison and accompanied by a sort of brazier or some kind of ritual object), oxen with and without humps, crocodiles, buffaloes, tiger, rhinoceroses and elephants, although oxen are by far the most common. In addition to animals, some seals were also carved with human figures, including the very interesting one found at Mohenjo-daro and now housed in the National Museum of India in New Delhi, which shows a three-faced male deity with horns seated in the lotus position. An elephant and a tiger are depicted to the right of the figure and a buffalo and a rhinoceros to the left, while two antelopes appear beneath what appears to be a sort of canopied throne.

An element extending from the lower abdomen can probably be identified as an ithyphallic representation. A significant number of iconographic elements are thus contained in this seal, leading us to the subsequent development of Indian culture.

Many scholars have identified the figure depicted as a proto-Shiva, a prefiguration of what was to become one of the greatest deities with the most fascinating and multifaceted nature of the Indian pantheon.

This assimilation is based on three elements: the yoga-style posture that is well suited to Shiva in his form as Lord of Yoga and *Mahayogin*, the ithyphallic representation that refers to Shiva honored in the abstract form of a phallic symbol, the *linga*, and finally the presence of animals that

recalls *Shiva Pashupati*, Lord of the Animals. The two antelopes represented below the *yogin* prefigure the pair of stags often carved on stelae from the Gupta period, which are shown crouching before the throne of another *yogin*: the Buddha.

The numerous pottery finds include many terracotta figurines of female subjects with large breasts and accentuated navels – elements referring to maternity and fertility that appear to attest to the cult of the Mother-Goddess among the Indus Valley populations. These figurines are nude, except for a small skirt adorned with pendants and medals and fastened by a belt around the hips. Some figurines also have a distinctive fan-shaped hairstyle with two basket-like projections at the sides; as black marks have been found at the bottom of these cavities, it is believed that they were lamps or incense burners.

30 LEFT - THIS TERRACOTTA FIGURINE WITH ACCENTUATED BREASTS AND HIPS APPEARS TO ATTEST TO THE CULT OF THE MOTHER-GODDESS AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI).

30 RIGHT - A PECULIAR CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FEMALE TERRACOTTA FIGURINES OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION IS THE ELABORATE FAN-SHAPED HAIRSTYLE WITH TWO BASKET-LIKE PROJECTIONS AT THE SIDES (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI).

31 LEFT - THE STEATITE SEALS PRODUCED BY THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION OFTEN DEPICT ANIMALS, MANY OF WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY BECAME THE VEHICLES (*VAHANAS*) OF THE LATER HINDU PANTHEON (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI).

31 RIGHT - MANY SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT THE FIGURE CARVED ON THIS STEATITE SEAL REPRESENTS SHIVA PASHUPATI, LORD OF THE ANIMALS (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI).

ART AND THE CITIES OF THE INDUS VALLEY

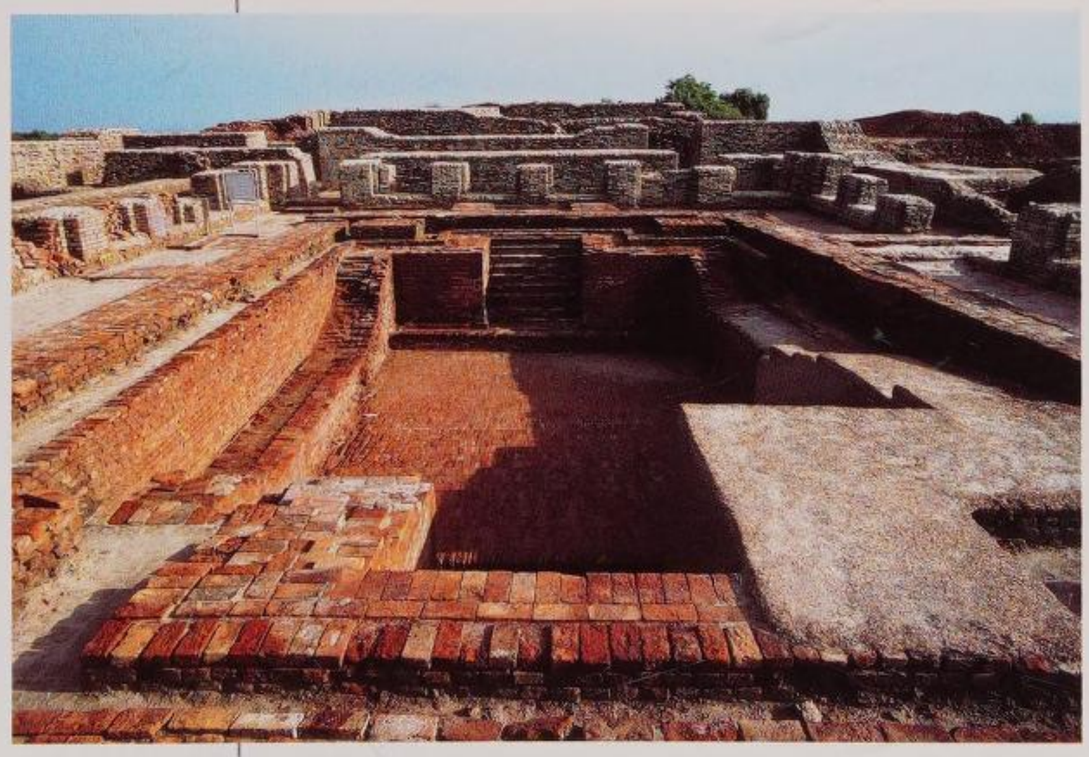
One of the finest statues of the Indus Valley civilization is the so-called "priest-king" found at Mohenjo-daro. This is a small steatite bust, whose facial features share remarkable similarities with statues of Sumerian priests: a short, well-groomed beard and hair held back by a headband around the forehead, which is tied at the nape of the neck with the two ends hanging on the neck and shoulders. There is a circular ornament in the center of the headband on the forehead. The expression of the face, particularly the eyes, seems to suggest contemplation, ascesis or a fixed hieratic quality. The torso is covered with a kind of toga, fastened on one shoulder, and passing beneath the other arm. The garment is decorated with geometric motifs that appear to be trefoils, which were probably a sacred symbol. Several scholars have suggested that the figure could be a foreigner, possibly a Mesopotamian considering the long straight nose, ideal continuation of the forehead, full lips and elongated eyes, which are all unusual somatic features in the past and present inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. The trefoil motif also reinforces the bond with the West, for it is a recurrent theme in the art of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Minoan civilization, while it is completely absent in all subsequent Indian artistic production. Various hypotheses have been proposed regarding the social role of this figure: the priestly nature is corroborated by the use of the headband; the expression of the eyes, which suggests a spiritual and authoritative definition; and the tunic that leaves one shoulder bare, echoing the subsequent Buddhist custom.

Nothing is known of the nature and means of exercise of political and spiritual power in the Indus Valley civilization. However, the reconstruction of the main urban settlements appears to suggest the presence of a strongly centralizing political and administrative system, owing to the characteristic urbanistic, architectural and artistic uniformity of the cities. The political system is believed to have been a theocracy or in any case a highly centralized organization, which generated the great uniformity of characteristics regarding both the planning of settlements and the construction of homes, the system of weights and measures, and the production of ceramics. Indeed, all of the pottery was reddish-brown, thrown and decorated with black animal or geometric motifs, while in the cities themselves the regular dimensions of the streets, districts and even the bricks used for the construction of the houses support the hypothesis of a central authority.

32 LEFT - A LID OF A FUNERARY URN DECORATED WITH BLACK GEOMETRIC NATURALISTIC MOTIFS ON A GLOSSY RED GROUND (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI).

32 RIGHT - THIS TERRACOTTA VASE FROM MOHENJO-DARO IS DECORATED WITH A REALISTIC PAINTING OF A GOAT (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI).

33 - THIS SMALL STEATITE BUST IS ONE OF THE MOST ENIGMATIC ARTIFACTS OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION. ITS FEATURES AND GARMENT SUGGEST THAT IT COULD REPRESENT A FOREIGNER (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI).

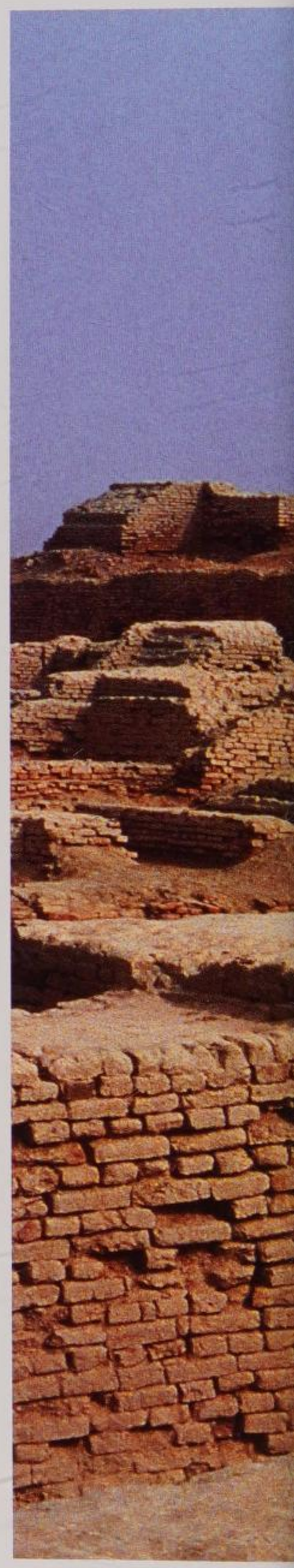


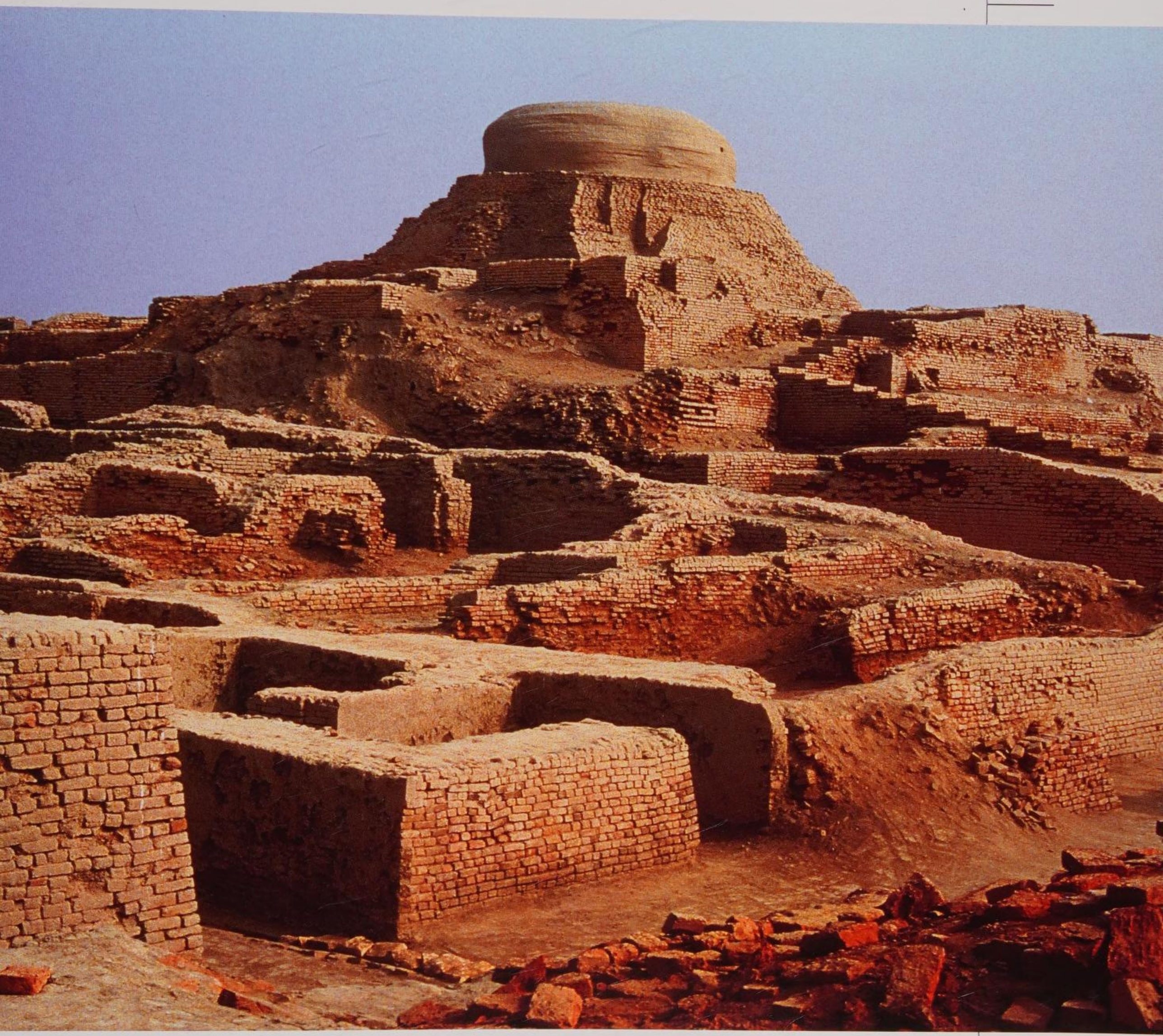
34 TOP - THE RUINS OF HARAPPA REVEAL AN EXTREMELY DEVELOPED CIVIC SENSE: EACH CITY OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION HAD AN URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN THAT ESTABLISHED THE PRECISE ORIENTATION OF THE SETTLEMENT.

The cities of the Indus Valley civilization were magnificent, with an urban development plan unrivalled by any other contemporary civilization and a sewage system matched only by that of the much later Roman civilization. The houses all had square plans, with a central courtyard onto which the entrances of the rooms opened. They had bathrooms and sometimes several stories. Both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were constituted by a separately fortified acropolis and lower city. The raised citadel stood to the west of the city and in both cases was built on an artificial platform made of bricks, while the lower part of the city was organized according to a checkerboard plan divided into rectangular blocks. No temples or buildings dedicated to worship have been found, with the partial exception of the "great bath" of Mohenjo-daro. This lustral pool, coated with bitumen and measuring 39 x 23 ft (11.8 x 7 m) with a depth of 8 ft (2.4 m), is surrounded on three sides by a colonnade that opens onto several cubicles, recalling the ritual baths of historical India.

The society's economic basis was highly developed agricultural activity centered on the production of wheat, barley and cotton. Many granaries have been discovered on the riverbank north of Harappa, built in two rows with six storage areas, each featuring ventilation ducts. The presence of granaries and large silos for the storage of agricultural produce in other locations is a sign of the wealth of this civilization. Various species of animals were domesticated – although not horses – and trade and cultural relations with the contemporary Mesopotamian civilizations were so intense and important that it was initially believed that Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were both Mesopotamian outposts built or designed by groups of emigrants.

On the whole, the Indus Valley civilization appears to have been imbued with a strong utilitarianism, although it also possessed a refined artistic sensibility, whose results we have already partially examined and whose most enchanting expressions are embodied in sculpture.





34 CENTER - THE "GREAT BATH" OF MOHENJO-DARO APPEARS TO BE THE ONLY BUILDING THAT MAY HAVE BEEN USED FOR CEREMONIAL OR RITUAL PURPOSES: THE FUNCTIONS OF ALL THE OTHER STRUCTURES WERE PURELY UTILITARIAN.

34 BOTTOM - THIS WELL, SITUATED IN THE LOWER CITY OF MOHENJO-DARO, REVEALS THE REGULARITY IN SIZE OF THE BRICKS USED TO CONSTRUCT THE BUILDINGS OF THE CITY.

34-35 - MOHENJO-DARO, LIKE HARAPPA, INCORPORATED AN ACROPOLIS AND A LOWER CITY. THE RAISED CITADEL STOOD TO THE WEST OF THE CITY, AND THE SETTLEMENT EXTENDED BENEATH ITS WALLS.

36 top - The refinement and elegance of the jewelry of the Indus Valley civilization can be seen in this gold, silver and steatite brooch from Harappa (left) and the agate and chalcedony necklace from Mohenjo-daro (right) (National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi).

Two trends can be identified in Mohenjo-daro: on the one hand, bearded and hieratic virile portraits, with wide planes, that appear to be related to Sumerian, Hittite or even Egyptian representations, and on the other works that seem to refer to certain kinds of art forms produced in Luristan, enriched with proto-Scythian and proto-Phoenician elements. While the famous "priest-king" statue is a fine expression of the first tendency, the second is exemplified by a bronze female figure that appears to represent a dancer. The body is nude and the forms unnatural, with elongated limbs. The female features are only slightly accentuated and the overall effect of the figure is ethereal. The physiognomy of the face, with an absorbed expression, recalls that of the Dravidian populations, with a high forehead, prominent lips and a flattened nose, corroborating the hypothesis that the main ethnic group of the Indus Valley civilization was Dravidian. However, the profusion of ornaments and the hairstyle recall what were to become typically Indian tastes and customs.

Harappan sculpture, on the other hand, is characterized by completely different motifs that, in the greater plasticity of bodies and skilled dynamism of male nudes, foreshadow the successive blossoming of the Maurya period (322-184 BC). A mutilated grey stone torso believed to represent a dancing deity with three heads provides a good example of Harappan production.

The mystery that still surrounds our knowledge of the imposing Indus Valley civilization becomes even more impenetrable if we seek an explanation of its decline and disappearance. Following the early finds at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, the end of the civilization was initially attributed to the devastating fury of the so-called Aryans, or Indo-Aryans. However, subsequent excavations cast doubt on the validity of this hypothesis and today the causes of the collapse tend to be sought in environmental factors, such as tectonic changes that shifted the course of the Indus, causing a series of cataclysmic floods that were followed by a gradual reduction in rainfall, the progressive salinization of the cultivated areas and the expansion of the desert, which still occupies these once fertile and forested areas.

36-37 - This gold cup from Quetta is adorned with a relief depicting lions, as well as the usual geometric naturalistic motifs (National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi).

37 bottom - This small gold bull from Quetta illustrates the great realism of the Indus Valley craftsmen in the creation of animal figures (National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi).

38 TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT - SEVERAL EVERYDAY OBJECTS INDICATE THE SOPHISTICATED LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION: A COPPER HAIRPIN, A STICK AND JAR FOR COLLYRIUM, AND A MIRROR, ALL FROM MOHENJO-DARO (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI).

38 BOTTOM LEFT AND CENTER - THE PEOPLE OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION APPEAR TO HAVE DEDICATED GREAT ATTENTION TO THEIR APPEARANCE. THESE TWO COPPER AND TERRACOTTA VESSELS WERE USED TO HOLD COSMETICS (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PAKISTAN, KARACHI).

39 TOP - IN INDIA GAMBLING DATES BACK TO THE COPPER AGE, AS SHOWN BY THESE DICE FROM MOHENJO-DARO (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI).

39 BOTTOM - CHECKERBOARDS ENGRAVED ON BRICKS OR MADE FROM FIRED CLAY HAVE BEEN FOUND AT MOST HARAPPAN SITES (ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, HARAPPA).

2

THE ARYANS AND THE FORMATION OF THE EARLIEST KINGDOMS (1800 - 322 BC)

The Aryans
page 42

The Emergence of the Earliest Kingdoms
page 46

The Vedic Religion
page 50

The Caste System
page 52

Buddhism and Jainism
page 54

41 - This bodhisattva head dates from the 2nd century AD. Two virtues emerge from the ideal represented by the figure: benevolence (*maitri*) and compassion (*karuna*) (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

43 - Brahma, the god who oversees the creation, is shown holding a page of the Veda. These texts, of divine origin, constitute the basis of the entire religious culture of Hinduism (India Office Library, London).

The term Aryan is traditionally used to refer to the nomadic groups originating on the plains north of the Caucasus between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea that entered the Indian subcontinent around 1800 BC. Following the discovery of the earliest finds at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, scholars immediately attributed the sudden and violent end of the culturally more advanced Indus Valley civilization to the arrival of the Aryans. Indeed, the upper layers of Mohenjo-daro yielded around 30 skeletons bearing clear signs of violent death. The presence of the Aryans in the subcontinent was described in terms of a process of conquest of the aboriginal peoples, which was also considered an appropriate explanation of the origin and nature of the caste system. However, subsequent excavations revealed that the finds at Mohenjo-daro were unique and were not necessarily the result of a massacre by an invading population, but could instead have been caused by a natural catastrophe. The skeletons of a family of five people trapped in the rubble after the collapse of the walls and roof of their home are highly emblematic in this respect. The theory was further challenged by the analysis of literary texts that revealed that the Aryan priesthood included numerous members of the Indus Valley civilization, and that, from a linguistic viewpoint, Sanskrit borrows heavily from non-Aryan languages in terms of syntax, vocabulary and phonetics.

The identification of other elements of cultural continuity between the two civilizations led scholars to reappraise the hypothesis of the violent and ruinous incursion of the Aryans in the subcontinent, emphasizing instead how their arrival heralded a process of cultural and racial synthesis. It is currently believed that the Aryans reached India in successive migratory waves of herders and merchants that were gradually integrated and fused with the native populations, who were mainly farmers. However, since the 1980s the theory of conquest with successive and consequent submission and that of assimilation have been flanked by a third hypothesis claiming the autochthonous origin of the Aryans. According to this theory, the Indian subcontinent was the original homeland of the Aryans and the Indus Valley civilization was their product. The arguments supporting this view are principally based on astroarchaeological data, and it is thus claimed that the astronomical references contained in the Vedas – the most important source of information on the Aryans and their greatest cultural feat – describe astronomical configurations and solar paths that belonged to a period far more remote than 1500 BC.

Another aspect that deserves consideration regards the Sarasvati River, which has now dried up, but was described in the Vedas at the height of its water-carrying capacity. There is much difference of opinion regarding the period during which this watercourse dried up and some scholars – capitalizing on the fact that the date from which the oldest corpus of the Vedas began to be compiled is uncertain – shift the event to before the birth and blossoming of the Indus Valley civilization. They maintain that all these factors combine to prove that the Aryans originated in India and to corroborate the identification of the Aryans with the Indus Valley civilization; an assertion that also serves to boost the arguments and claims of Hindu nationalists. However, all that we can infer regarding the Aryans, their origins, system of belief and social and political organization stems from the analysis and interpretation of literary sources rather than archaeological data. Indeed, the centuries between the presumed arrival of the Aryans in the subcontinent and the formation of the first centers of political power in the northeast (i.e., between the 18th and 6th centuries BC) are characterized by an extreme paucity of archaeological finds. The first official document containing references to the Aryans is the peace treaty of 1350 BC, stipulated between a Hittite king and the governor of the kingdom of the Mitanni, in which the deities Mitra, Varuna, Indra and Nasatya were invoked as witnesses of the Aryans. However, the most important source of information on the Aryans is constituted by the Vedas.

The term "Veda" ("knowledge, consciousness") is used to designate the basis of the entire Indian religious culture, whose origin is considered divine. Indeed, these texts, "heard" in the heart during meditation by poets, bards or seers known as *rishi*, present a kind of self-revelation of the truth, or Absolute Reality. The core of the Veda is constituted by the

first three collections known as "threefold knowledge" (*trayi-vidya*), the Rig Veda (knowledge expressed in sacred verses), the Sama Veda (knowledge expressed in chants) and the Yajur Veda (knowledge expressed in liturgical formulas), plus a fourth, the Atharva Veda (knowledge expressed in magic texts). They are collections of mantras (sacred hymns), which were subsequently completed with a series of exegetic and liturgical texts called the Brahmanas, books of meditation known as the Aranyakas and speculative philosophical and religious texts called the Upanishads. The language in which they were composed is known as archaic Sanskrit, Old Indo-Aryan or Vedic. For a long time these texts were transmitted orally, from one generation of Brahman priests to the next, and were certainly not recorded in written form before the 2nd century BC. Nonetheless, the texts have remained surprisingly intact, considering that the oldest collection, the Rig Veda, has reached us without any variations. It is believed that the composition of the hymns contained in the Rig Veda was completed around 1000 BC. However, opinions vary greatly as to the age of the oldest hymns, although the most credible dating is currently considered to be around the 16th-15th century BC.

The first hymns were composed when the Aryans were settled in northwest Indian, while the successive ones reflect the life of those who moved to the Doab (the alluvial tract between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers). Upon their arrival in India the Aryans were an aggregation of nomadic tribes devoted mainly to herding, along with raiding and guerilla warfare. The tribes were led by a chief, known as a *raja*, elected by its male members, who was supported by a council. In addition to warring with the native populations, referred to as Dasa or Dasyu in the hymns of the Riga Veda, the Aryan tribes were in constant strife among themselves. The famous Bharata tribe, which headed a confederacy of ten princes, is still remembered today in the official name of the Republic of India, Bharat, adopted in 1950.

The organization of Aryan society was patriarchal, with a predilection for the birth of sons, who were useful for both tending the herds and performing the funerary rites of their parents. Although the condition of women was probably better than it was during the subsequent history of India, females nonetheless occupied a subordinate position. Marriages were generally monogamous and there is no evidence of the existence of child marriages.

The Aryans loved music and dance and were familiar with various musical instruments, including the flute, the lute and the harp. They were also keen dice players and did not disdain the use of inebriating beverages, including *soma*, whose divine and sacred nature they extolled. The Aryans' main contribution to the technology of the period was the spoked wheel. Livestock was generally highly regarded, and particularly horses, which were used for both military and ceremonial purposes, while cows were so highly valued as to be used as currency.

Until 1000 BC Aryan society remained substantially tribal and pre-urban, characterized by the gradual evolution from herding and nomadism to a sedentary life based on agriculture. The transition to a sedentary lifestyle led not only to the intensification of conflicts with the aboriginal peoples, but also to the stratification of Aryan society. While the word Dasa is used generically in the Rig Veda to refer to a person belonging to another culture, i.e., a non-Aryan, later sources use the term to indicate a subordinate or enslaved individual, whose specific task was to serve others. The development of the use of the term Dasa thus reveals a change in the Aryan perception of the aboriginal peoples and foreshadowed the social class of the Shudras. Furthermore, the growing dependence of Aryan society on agricultural rather than herding activities created the necessary conditions for the ever greater diversification of

trades and occupations. The period between 1000 and 500 BC witnessed the spread of the Aryans to the upper and middle Ganges Valley, heralding the emergence of a new urban civilization. The introduction of iron, which certainly took place before 1000 BC in India, initially for weapons and subsequently for agricultural implements, promoted a revolutionary phase of economic expansion that culminated in the diffusion of an urban civilization throughout the Ganges Valley from the 4th century BC.

44 top - This terracotta tile (5th century AD) depicts a musician, probably a Gandharva, a divine being (British Museum, London).

44-45 - This relief from the Darasuram temple shows a dancer with three pairs of legs in various positions, suggesting the idea of movement.

45 right - This sculpture of a dancer is from Mahabalipuram. The dance expresses the elegance and fury of the cosmogonical act, the imperturbability of the absolute, and the frenzy of the dissolution of the world.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE EARLIEST KINGDOMS

46-47 - This lintel of the northern *torana* of the Great Stupa of Sanchi offers important information regarding houses and civil buildings, which were generally built using perishable materials and thus have not survived.

Around 600 BC all of northern India was characterized by the coexistence of two forms of government and political power: monarchies and what could be defined republics, but whose original name of *ganasangha* refers to a group of individuals of equal social dignity, a group of equals, united in an assembly. The second urbanization of India, of which epicenter was in the Ganges rather than the Indus Valley, occurred during this period.

In the context of the monarchies, we can observe the paradigmatic evolution of the word *raja*: although the term was initially used to indicate the fully acknowledged leader elected by members of the tribe, it gradually acquired the meaning of sovereign during the late Vedic period. Indeed, the assertion of the role became consequent on victory in a series of conflicts fought among the nobility for the conquest of power and the full legitimacy of the sovereign's rank was derived from his ritual investiture by Brahman priests. The figure of the clan leader was replaced by that of a king whose legitimacy was not simply derived from his victory over the other claimants, but also from the fact that he was invested with the task of governing the people by the priesthood. Indeed, it appears that the per-

formance of great ritual sacrifices (*yajnas*) during which the priests conferred divine characteristics on the *raja* was decisive in shaping the new role assumed by the *raja*. Equally fundamental was the shift away from the clannish organization of society and government and the gradual and parallel impoverishment of the concept of *vish* (meaning "clan" or "people").

The bond and interdependence that were gradually established between spiritual and temporal authority are further testified by the fact that when the functions of the priestly class became distinctive, the *raja* laid claim to even greater authority, for he became the patron and guarantor of the sacrifice, and the center of the Vedic religion and the activities of the Brahmans.

At the same time the position of *raja* became hereditary and primogeniture became the dominant criterion for succession. The role of the assembly (*sabha*) that backed the actions of the chief was notably curtailed for final authority belonged to the king, who was flanked by the *purohita*, a priest who had the task of advising and protecting the sovereign with his magical powers, and the *senani*, the military commander.

This process of sedentarization, which had started to become apparent around 1000 BC, initially promoted the identification between a certain territory and a clan or confederacy of clans, which was followed by the claim to the ownership of the inhabited area and finally by the political organization that allowed its possession to be maintained. This led to the establishment of a series of tribal principalities, *janapadas* (meaning "footholds of tribes") in constant strife with each other. Sixteen *mahajanapadas*, great tribal regions whose members did not all belong to the same tribe, emerged between the 7th and 6th centuries BC. The main ones were: Magadha, southeast of the Ganges; Kosala, north of the Ganges; Vatsa, south of the Ganges; Kashi, corresponding to modern-day Varanasi; Avanti, which comprised the area surrounding Ujjain; Kalinga, in southern Orissa; and Anga, in northern Bengal. The most powerful *mahajanapadas* were Magadha and Kos-

ala, which started to follow an aggressive policy aimed at the annexation of the territories of vanquished populations during the 5th century BC. Magadha, which later came to dominate the area, controlled trade on the eastern Ganges and, following the conquest of Anga, became a leading power under King Bimbisara, while the kingdom of Kosala strengthened its power by annexing the ancient realm of Kashi and the territories of the Shakya tribe. Between the 7th and 6th centuries BC the cities started to be defended by fosses and sometimes earthworks that also offered protection against flooding, for the settlements were often located along the banks of rivers. Cities also started to be fortified with baked-brick walls.

Between 700 and 300 BC a uniform type of glossy black pottery spread across a vast area, which is currently considered a certain sign of urbanization by scholars. It was probably the finest pottery not only in India and southern Asia but the whole ancient world. Its wide distribution can be explained in several ways: some attribute it to the diffusion of Maurya imperialism, others consider it a consequence of the expansion of Buddhism, while others still believe that it simply followed existing trade routes, which were becoming ever more extensive and varied.

The rising monarchies were flanked by clans, such as the Shakya, one of the many mountain tribes that, despite maintaining their tribal identity and autonomy, gradually entered the constantly expanding sphere of influence of Aryan power and confederacies of clans governed by a council (including the Vrijji and Vrishni), whose members were drawn by right of birth from a small group of families. These forms of political and social organization (*ganasangha*) constituted the alternative to kingdoms and were characterized by a form of government in which the representatives of the families belonging to a clan or the heads of the various clans ruled the territory through an assembly of which they were the sole members. The result was a form of proto-state in which power was not centralized and the coerciveness of the authority was limited. The battle for political pre-eminence between the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha and the Vrijji confederacy lasted for many years. Eventually the struggle was won by Magadha, which became the political center of northern India, a position that it maintained for several centuries. The first important king of Magadha was Bimbisara, who lived between 540 and 490 BC. He belonged to the Shishunaga family, an ancient clan of non-Aryan origin. Once he had conquered Anga and thus secured the wealthy area beneath the delta of the Ganges, Bimbisara reorganized the structure of the kingdom and founded a new capital. His son Ajatashatru, who is said to have ascended the throne by murdering his father, founded the city of Pataliputra (now Patna) at the confluence of the Gandak and the Ganges, in order to control traffic on the river. Ajatashatru continued the tradition of marital alliances inaugurated by his father by marrying a Kosala princess and thus extending his influence over the region. It was during his reign that Magadha defeated the Vrijji confederacy, marking the decisive victory of the monarchical form of government over the republican-oligarchic regime.

During the 5th century the kingdom of Avanti also fell under the control of Magadha, which at the time appears to have been ruled by King Shishunaga of the dynasty of the same name. His line was ended by an usurper, Mahapadma Nanda, who gave his name to the new Nanda dynasty. The period of Nanda rule is little documented, and Jain and Buddhist chronicles offer contrasting information. According to the Jain texts, Mahapadma belonged to the caste of barbers and was described by contemporary chronicles as an incredibly fierce man who did not hesitate to exterminate the ruling dynasty in order to seize power. He was responsible for the expansion of the kingdom with the conquest of Kalinga. According to Greek and Roman sources, the Nandas had an imposing army composed of 200,000 foot soldiers, 20,000 horsemen, 2000 chariots, each drawn by a team of 4 horses, and 3000 elephants. The Nandas were able to fund the upkeep of this army only by heavy taxation and the constant plundering of neighboring kingdoms.

Mahapadma was succeeded by eight sons, the last of whom was dethroned in about 322 BC by Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty (322-184 BC). Mahapadma Nanda was not only the first low-caste king, but also created the first historical Indian empire and was the first Indian sovereign to use the imperial title of *ekacchatra*, "he who united the country under a single umbrella."

48 - This sculpture from Amaravati (2nd century AD) depicts the episode of the Subjugation of the Wild Elephant Nalagiri by Buddha (Government Museum, Chennai).

49 - This relief describes an episode in the life of the Buddha: his departure from his father's house and his first step on the path to Enlightenment (British Museum, London).

THE VEDIC RELIGION

The focus of the Vedic religion is sacrifice. One of the many terms used to refer to this practice, and probably the most significant due to its multiple meanings, is *karman*, meaning "act." Indeed, the sacrificial rite is depicted as the perfect act, a guarantee of stability and universal order. According to Hindu texts the world itself originated from the sacrifice of the Primal Man, Purusha, from whose dismembered body the various constituent elements of the universe were created. It is for this reason that the sacrificial rite, tracing the stages of the emanation and dissolution of the universe, contributes to the regeneration of the latter and reasserts the identity between the human, macrocosmic and divine spheres. This identification and the knowledge of the supreme transcendental law, known in the Vedic world as *rita*, which governs both the universe and the gods, determines the efficacy of the rite that is capable even of constraining the will of the deity if correctly performed. During the Vedic period it was believed that rites were effective instruments for obtaining the fulfillment of all sorts of desires, which were mostly worldly in nature: Vedic man made sacrifices to increase his livestock, generate sons, obtain the commodities that he desired, live a long and happy life and escape pain.

The Vedic religion is fundamentally solar and luminous and was articulated in a dialogue composed of continuous binding requests to the deity, addressed through the Brahmans, who thus increased their influence and prestige and consequently also their power. Relations between humankind and the gods were characterized by a reciprocal dependency: the former reinforced the deities through their prayers and offerings, while the latter granted them favors and blessings. The rites were divided into domestic and solemn. While the first type could be officiated by the head of the family at the domestic hearth, the second kind required the expertise of a Brahman priest. The Vedic cult did not have shrines, but simple sacrificial altars, three of which were generally used for solemn rites. The performance of the solemn rites, the most important of which were the sacrifice to Soma, the horse rite and that used to consecrate the king, could require up to a year.

The Vedic pantheon, whose principal deities are Agni, Indra, Varuna and Mitra, is almost exclusively male and the few goddesses mentioned usually play a marginal role. This is highly significant if we consider the subsequent importance of female deities in Hinduism, for it indicates the successive incorporation of non-Brahmanic aspects. The most prominent female figure among the few celebrated in the Vedas is Vac, the personification of the voice or word, whose importance in sacrifice exceeds even that of Agni, fire, thus reasserting the centrality of sound and the word in religious practices.

50 - This sculpture from Konarak temple depicts the god Surya in a chariot drawn by seven horses. The anthropomorphic cult of Surya, the Vedic sun god, was probably introduced to India from Iran.

51 - The god Agni is closely associated with the sacrificial rite: Agni is not only identified with the element of fire in general, but particularly with the sacrificial fire that conveys offerings to the gods (Musée Guimet, Paris).

THE CASTE SYSTEM

The word "caste," of Portuguese origin, indicates that which is pure, and is used to translate the Sanskrit term *jati*, which means "birth." The *jati* is a localized, hereditary and endogamous group, associated with a trade and occupying a certain position in the hierarchy to which it belongs. Relations between the castes are governed by criteria of ritual purity and impurity that determine the rules of commensality. The Sanskrit word *varna*, which literally means color, is also often incorrectly translated with the term "caste," but instead designates the hierarchy of social classes based on categories of roles introduced to India by the Indo-Aryan peoples. The overlap and confusion between these two terms actually originates in Indian sources, however it is difficult to consider the *jatis* as a subdivision of the *varnas*.

The social order introduced by the Aryans not only distinguishes the Aryans themselves from the aboriginal populations, but also divides them up according to a classification that is common to all Indo-European peoples and based on role. The division of society into three classes corresponds to a triple-purpose religious ideology comprised of a magical and juridical sovereignty, gods with a warrior-like character and strength, and fertility deities. The oldest and most significant mention of the four *varnas* of Aryan society appears in the famous hymn 10.90 of the Rig Veda, which refers to a Being (Purusha) whose immense body was immolated in a primordial sacrifice, generating all parts of the universe and society.

The creation of the world is represented as the result of this dismembering. Part by part, Purusha sacrificed his own existence, the gods were born from him, the Brahmans originated from his head, the Kshatriyas from his

arms, the Vaisyas from his thighs and, lastly, the Shudras from his feet. Each part of society corresponds to a dismembered part of Purusha and is thus attributed with divine origin. Each of these categories was also given a color: white for the Brahmans (the priestly class), red for the Kshatriyas (princes and noble warriors), yellow for the Vaisyas (merchants) and finally, black for the Shudras, whose task it was to serve the other three classes. The members of the first three social classes are known as *dvija*, "twice-born," for they participate in the initiation ceremony of the *upanayana* that is regarded as a spiritual birth and allows them to aspire to liberation, the supreme goal of Hinduism. Liberation is thus impossible for the Shudras, who are not allowed to study or even listen to the Vedas. While there are four *varnas*, there are several thousand *jatis*, which indicate the status acquired by birth. The *varna* and the *jati* together determine the position of each individual in the caste hierarchy. Outside this structure lie the so-called untouchables, who constitute an extremely varied group, including tribal peoples, individuals excommunicated from their castes and various minorities.

52-53 - The richly decorated first lintel of the northern torana of the Great Stupa of Sanchi portrays scenes of daily life.

The lives and teaching of Vardhamana Mahavira and Siddharta Gautama, known as the Buddha, date to around the middle of the first millennium BC.

Both Jainism and Buddhism are heterodox religions in respect to Brahmanism, whose texts and traditions they refute, and both strive to escape transmigration between lives and the incessant wandering of each living monad through a sequence of ephemeral existences determined by actions (*karman*) performed in previous lives. Although there are undoubtedly many similarities between the two doctrines and between the figures of the Buddha (the "Enlightened One") and Mahavira (the "Great Hero"), there are also very profound and irreconcilable differences, in particular the opposite stance that the two reformist movements adopted toward ascetic practices. Indeed, the Buddha rejected them, defining them as undignified and useless, while Vardhamana embraced them as serving to counter the collection of consequences accumulated by one's past actions. Both doctrines describe ethical ways of salvation based on the right thought and actions of the individual.

Sources of information on the life and teachings of Gautama Siddharta, recount that he was a Kshatriya prince of the aristocratic Shakya family, who is believed to have been born in Kapilavastu in 563 BC. At the age of 29 Prince Siddharta abandoned his life of comfort and pleasure in favor of an ascetic existence. Following seven years of fasting and mortification of the flesh, he attained enlightenment as he was absorbed in meditation beneath a bodhi tree near the modern town of Bodh Gaya, south of Patna in the Bihar region. He subsequently delivered his first sermon in the Deer Park in Sarnath, marking the start of the diffusion of his soteriological message. This discourse centered on the Four Noble Truths, which subsequently formed the philosophical core of Hinayana ("Lesser Vehicle") Buddhism, as the school was controversially named by the followers of the later Mahayana ("Greater Vehicle") Buddhist tradition.

The first Noble Truth maintains that life is inexorably bound up with suffering. The second traces the origin of this suffering to an eternal craving for life that stems from the desires of the senses and the ignorance that clouds the intellect. The third maintains that suffering can be eliminated by suppressing desire and ignorance. Finally, the fourth Noble Truth teaches the way that leads to the elimination of suffering, known as the Noble Eightfold Path, whose basic purpose is to restore the original purity of man's cognitive relationship with the world. It consists in practicing right understanding, by which reality is contemplated without interference deriving from personal inclinations; right thought, which involves the uninterrupted control of thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood, which represents the mediation between the needs of physical life and the spiritual goals for which each individual strives; right effort, which requires each venture to be appropriate to the goal to be attained; right mindfulness; and right concentration. Followers of the Fightfold Path are able to interrupt the process of transmigration and reincarnation and reach Nirvana, the end of the existence of the individual self and the ensuing supreme state of bliss. The Buddha spent the rest of his life preaching the Noble Truths to the ever-larger group of disciples that formed around him, soon founding a monastic order (*sangha*) that was destined to grow and expand all over the world.

54 - This panel is from the Great Stupa at Amaravati. The Buddha was not initially represented in anthropomorphic form, but through symbols, such as footprints, the wheel (the symbol of Buddhist Law) or the tree under which he attained Enlightenment (British Museum, London).

55 - This relief from Amaravati depicts four episodes regarding the birth of Prince Siddharta, including the particularly interesting scene of Queen Maya giving birth while holding on to the branch of a tree (British Museum, London).

56 - This relief depicts the Enlightenment of the Buddha, represented by the footprints with the Wheel of the Law under the Bodhi tree, surrounded by devotees (British Museum, London).

57 - This slab from the Great Stupa at Amaravati clearly depicts the hemispherical or bell-shaped structure (*anda*) of a stupa, above which heavenly beings fly.

58-59 - This relief panel shows the Buddha's physical passing from this world and his achievement of Nirvana. He is shown lying on his right side, with one foot covering the other (British Museum, London).

58

HISTORY AND TREASURES OF AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION

Like Buddhism, Jainism is a religious philosophical doctrine whose goal is to achieve liberation from the suffering indissolubly bound up with life by means of ethically pure behavior. Vardhamana Mahavira (ca. 540-468 BC) had aristocratic origins, for he was the son of the chief of the Jnatrika tribe and was related to the Licchavi clan. He was born in Besarh, near Patna in Bihar state and, like Buddha, left his family around the age of 30 and started wandering around the Ganges Valley. At the age of 42 he attained enlightenment, becoming a Jina ("Conqueror"), an honorary title from which the term Jainism is derived.

Many years later, when the Jain canon was definitively established during the Council of Valabhi in AD 454, Mahavira was also given the title of 24th Tirthankara (literally, "Ford-maker"), the Jain equivalent of a deity. The central concept of Jainism is that everything has an eternal and uncreated soul (*jiva*). *Karman* particles bond themselves to the *jivas*, causing suffering and the perpetual cycle of reincarnation. However, the strengthening or weakening of karmic bondage is associated with the kind of actions performed, for example asceticism and voluntary suffering eliminate the burden of consequences produced by bad actions to be consumed in present and future lives, selfish and cruel acts produce a negative accumulation of *karman*, and morally worthy acts do not create any residues to eliminate.

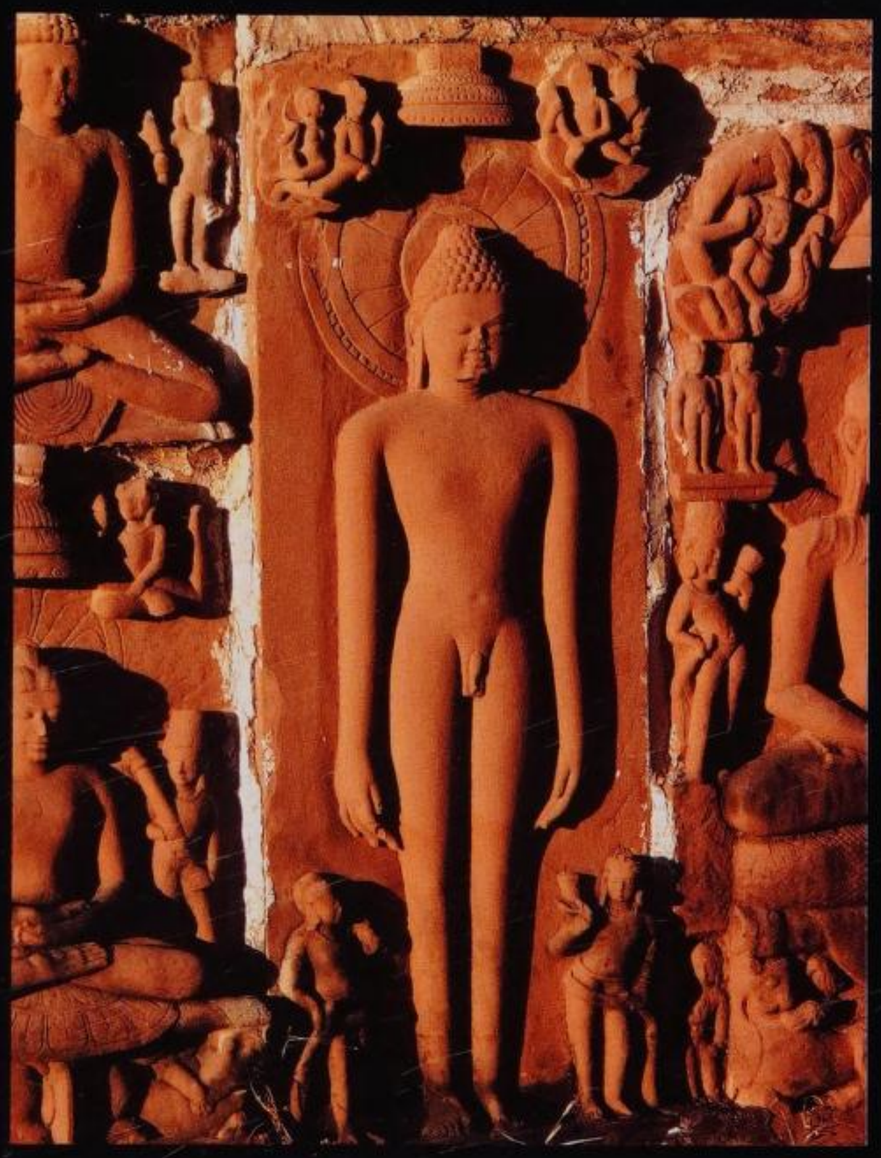
The Jain ethic thus rests on the concept that morally irreproachable behavior drastically reduces the accumulation of new *karman*.

The Jain ideal suggests and encourages voluntary death by starvation as the culmination of the process of perfection of human nature devised by Mahavira. An essential concept of the Jain moral universe is that of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, which subsequently also influenced Hinduism.

According to Mahavira, no living being must be killed or treated violently. This precept conditioned the economic decisions of devout lay Jains, for they could not perform agricultural work, which inevitably causes the death of living creatures including insects and worms, and thus chose occupations such as commerce and banking. This obedience to the rule of non-violence has made the lay Jain community – chiefly concentrated in Gujarat – an economic and commercial power.

60 - This bronze (10th century AD) depicts a Tirthankara. Following a period of physical and mental rigors, the Tirthankaras attain enlightenment, defined by Jains as omniscience. After their death, their pure souls reach the topmost area of the universe, and reside there with infinite knowledge and in a state of bless (Musée Guimet, Paris).

61 - This marble statue displays the iconography of the Tirthankaras, the "ford-makers," whose task is to restore the law of the eternal truth (British Museum, London).



62-63 - This statue of a Tirthankara dates from the 3rd century AD. The biographies and physical characteristics of the Tirthankaras are very similar, if not identical, and they differ only in the duration of their lives and their physical size (British Museum, London).

63 - The statues of standing Tirthankaras that adorn Temple 13 at Deogarh are inspired by one of the two major sects of the Jain congregation, the Digambara, which means "sky-clad."

3

THE FIRST IMPERIAL UNIFICATION AND ITS BREAKUP (322 BC-AD 320)

Chandragupta Maurya and the Birth of the First Indian Empire
page 66

Ashoka and the Policy of Conquest by Dharma
page 68

The Breakup of the Mauryan Empire
page 82

Gandhara Art
page 100

CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA AND THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST INDIAN EMPIRE

Little is known about the origins and rise to power of Chandragupta Maurya, although historians agree that he was of humble origin. Some believe that he was the son of a herder, while others claim that his mother belonged to the royal harem of the Nandas and that Chandragupta was the illegitimate son of the Nandas, whom he deposed and executed between 322 and 320 BC, seizing an empire that comprised much of northern India.

Chandragupta's military career appears to have commenced in western India, where he waged war on the outposts left by Alexander the Great along the banks of the Indus. It is not known how he managed to seize Magadha, although a famous Sanskrit drama, the *Mudrarakashasa*, attributes his political fortunes to the strategic genius of his prime minister, the astute Brahman Kautilya (or Canakya), believed to have written political treatise known as the *Arthashastra* that was destined to inspire the future deeds of most Indian rulers. The *Arthashastra* also represents a precious source of information regarding the organization of the Maurya state, which was peculiar in several respects. Indeed, it was strongly centralized and based on an extensive civil and military bureaucracy.

In 303 BC Chandragupta sealed a treaty with the Greek ruler Seleucus I Nicator, who had distinguished himself as the governor of the eastern part of the vast empire of Alexander the Great. Under this agreement Seleucus ceded Chandragupta all the territories east of Kabul, as well as Baluchistan, in exchange for 500 war elephants. The alliance between the two rulers was further strengthened by the marriage of Chandragupta to one of the daughters of the Greek sovereign, inaugurating the regular diplomatic relations that the Maurya empire maintained with the Seleucids and the other Greek rulers with the periodic dispatch of ambassadors. Indeed, a report by Megasthenes, of one of Seleucus' ambassadors, has made it possible to reconstruct the appearance of the capital of the Mauryan empire, Pataliputra, which was probably the largest city of the ancient world. Pataliputra had a circumference of over 20 miles (32 km) and was protected by a ring of walls with 570 towers and 64 gates. Unfortunately the splendid imperial capital was built of wood and so everything that we now know about it is derived from Megasthenes' account.

During the Mauryan period stone began to be used for sculpture and architecture and the art of pottery also received a great boost, as demonstrated by the numerous figures found in Bulandibagh. These statuettes well illustrate the contemporary taste for rich and flamboyant jewelry and elaborate hairstyles. This period also produced the earliest images of spirits believed to inhabit trees, forests and watercourses (*yaksha* and *yakshi*), which expressed a type of popular belief connected with nature, and fertility in particular.

According to Jain sources, Chandragupta abdicated in 301 BC to become a monk in southern India, where he fasted to death in accordance with the Jain ideal. He was succeeded by his son Bindusara, who is credited with the expansion of the Mauryan empire in southern India. However, Bindusara's greatest legacy to Indian history was his son, Ashoka.

65 - A detail of the western *torana* of the Great Stupa of Sanchi, part of a larger Buddhist complex that comprised stupas, monasteries and temples.

66 - A silver *karshapana* coin of the Mauryan Empire, with multiple punch marks, including a bull and an elephant (British Museum, London).

67 - This smiling terracotta head dates back to the Mauryan period and is characterized by the size and unusual style of its headdress-hairstyle (Patna Museum, Patna).

ASHOKA AND THE POLICY OF CONQUEST BY DHARMA

Ashoka's reign (269-232 BC) is well documented, with information from Buddhist sources, Sinhalese chronicles, the Tibetan monk Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India*, and above all from the numerous edicts that the ruler himself ordered to be inscribed on rock, stone or pillars. These inscriptions are constituted by around 5,000 words on at least 18 cliffs and 30 pillars, of which only 10 have survived in good condition. Apart from the edicts discovered in northwest India, which are written in Kharosthi script, derived from Aramaic, most of the inscriptions are in Brahmi script, the ancestor of all Indian alphabets.

Rock Edict XIII is particularly important, for it expresses Ashoka's remorse for the massacre that accompanied the conquest of Kalinga, a region corresponding to the modern-day state of Orissa. This was a central episode in Ashoka's reign, for at least two reasons: on the one hand it coincided with the greatest territorial extent of the Mauryan empire, but on the other it triggered a profound moral crisis in the sovereign, determining his subsequent conversion to Buddhism. Indeed, following the slaughter in Kalinga, Ashoka decided to pursue a policy consistent with the ethical principles of Buddhism and thus proclaimed compassion toward all people; respect for all religious beliefs; the practice of non-violence, with the consequent renouncement of war; the prohibition of Vedic-style sacrifices with animal offerings; the adoption of a vegetarian diet; and finally commitment to the creation of works of public utility.

Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism led him to promote the diffusion of the religion and, following the third Buddhist Council held in Pataliputra, probably around 250 BC, he inaugurated a large-scale missionary enterprise aimed at spreading the principles of dharma, and dispatched imperial delegations to all the neighboring countries and even further afield for this purpose. In order to intensify the teaching of the dharma within his huge empire, Ashoka also established a special class of high officers appointed to teach right behavior and to ensure that people observed it.

In order to glorify the Buddha, it appears that Ashoka distributed his relics in 84,000 stupas scattered all over his empire. The term "stupa" is used to designate a sacred Buddhist building (a mound) that houses relics of the Buddha or other Buddhist saints. Although stupas are considered strictly Buddhist monuments, they were in fact also built by adherents of Jainism. The stupa is a semispherical or bell-shaped structure

68 LEFT - PART OF A VOTIVE STUPA DECORATED WITH CARVED FIGURES OF THE BUDDHA IN THE MOLDINGS OF THE DRUM (ORIENTAL MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM, UK).

68 RIGHT - A RELIQUARY FROM THE MAURYAN PERIOD, FINELY DECORATED WITH ANIMAL FIGURES AND NATURALISTIC GEOMETRIC MOTIFS (VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON).

(*anda*) that rests on a square base (*mehdi*) and is surrounded by an outer ambulatory (*pradaksinapatha*) with four gateways aligned with the four cardinal points. A cube-shaped kiosk (*harmika*) stands on top of the dome and a triple parasol (*chattra*) rises from its center on a vertical pole (*yasti*). A stone railing (*vedika*) around the stupa delimits the outer area for ritual circumambulation, during which believers walk around the monument keeping it on their right side. The *vedika* has four gateways (*toranas*) aligned with the cardinal points, where narrative and descriptive art designed to edify and instruct believers was usually concentrated.

As the *toranas* represent the place of transit between the secular and sacred worlds, they understandably embody the monument's educational and initiatory function. In addition to its role as a funerary monument, the stupa also has cosmogonical and metaphysical meanings. Indeed, its structure evokes the image of the macrocosm: the *anda* represents the cosmic embryo floating in the primal waters from which the universe was born, while the *harmika* symbolizes the mythological cosmic mountain, the center of the universe, and the *yasti* is the symbol of the *axis mundi*, the world axis connecting the underworld, Earth and heaven – the same symbology implied by the pillars of Ashoka. Finally, in cosmological terms, the *vedika* symbolizes the range of mountains that encloses the universe. As in the later Hindu temples, the plans from which these architectural macrocosms developed are mandalas, psychocosmograms that represent both the universe and the psyche.

69 TOP - THIS RELIEF BY THE GANDHARA SCHOOL SHOWS SEVERAL FIGURES ENGAGED IN THE RITUAL OF *PRADAKSHINA*, THE CLOCKWISE CIRCUMAMBULATION OF THE STUPA (BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON).

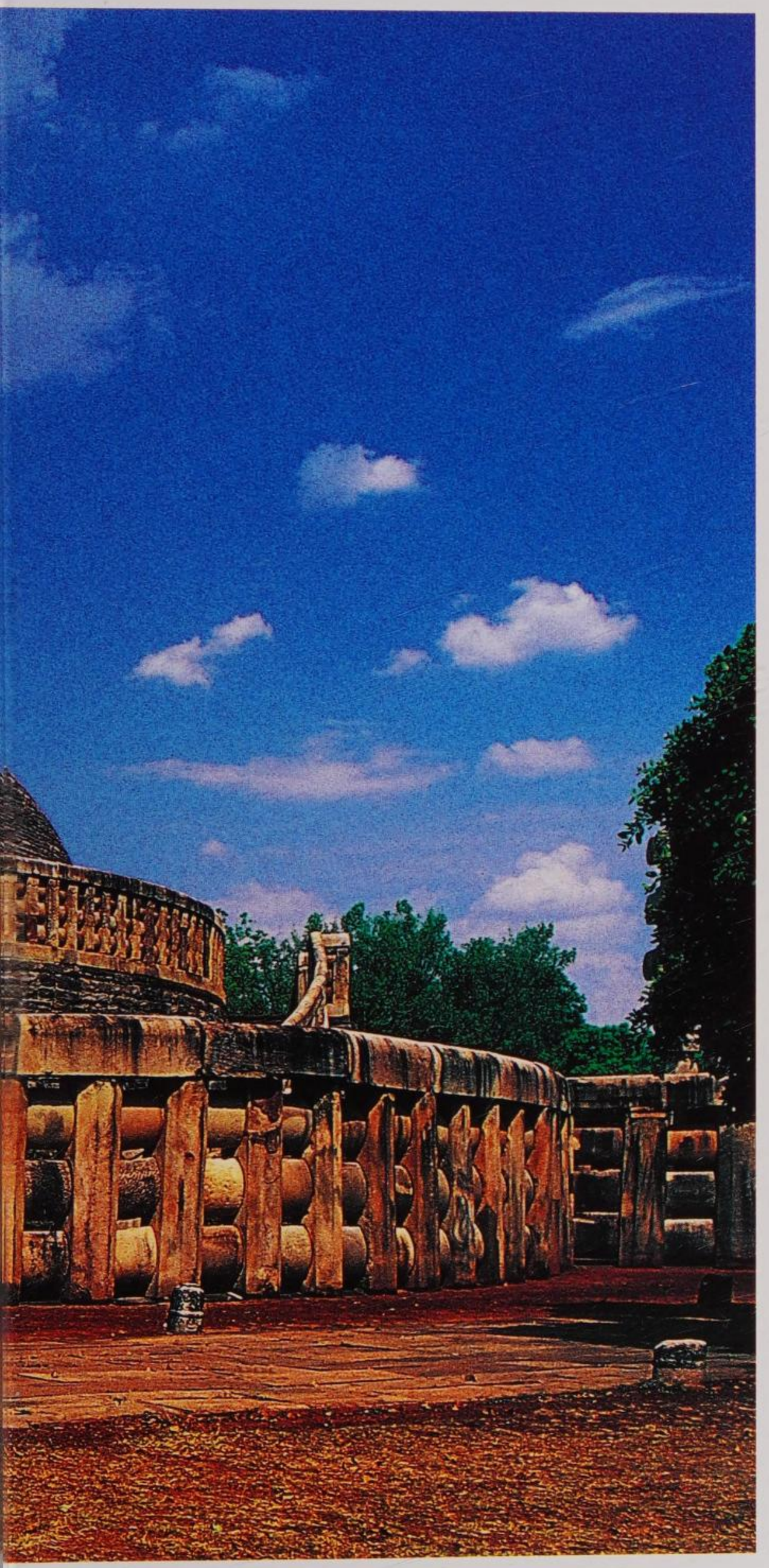
69 BOTTOM - THE WIDE DIFFUSION OF RELIQUARIES DURING THE MAURYAN PERIOD IS DEMONSTRATED BY THIS STUPA-SHAPED MODEL PRODUCED BY THE GANDHARA SCHOOL (BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON).

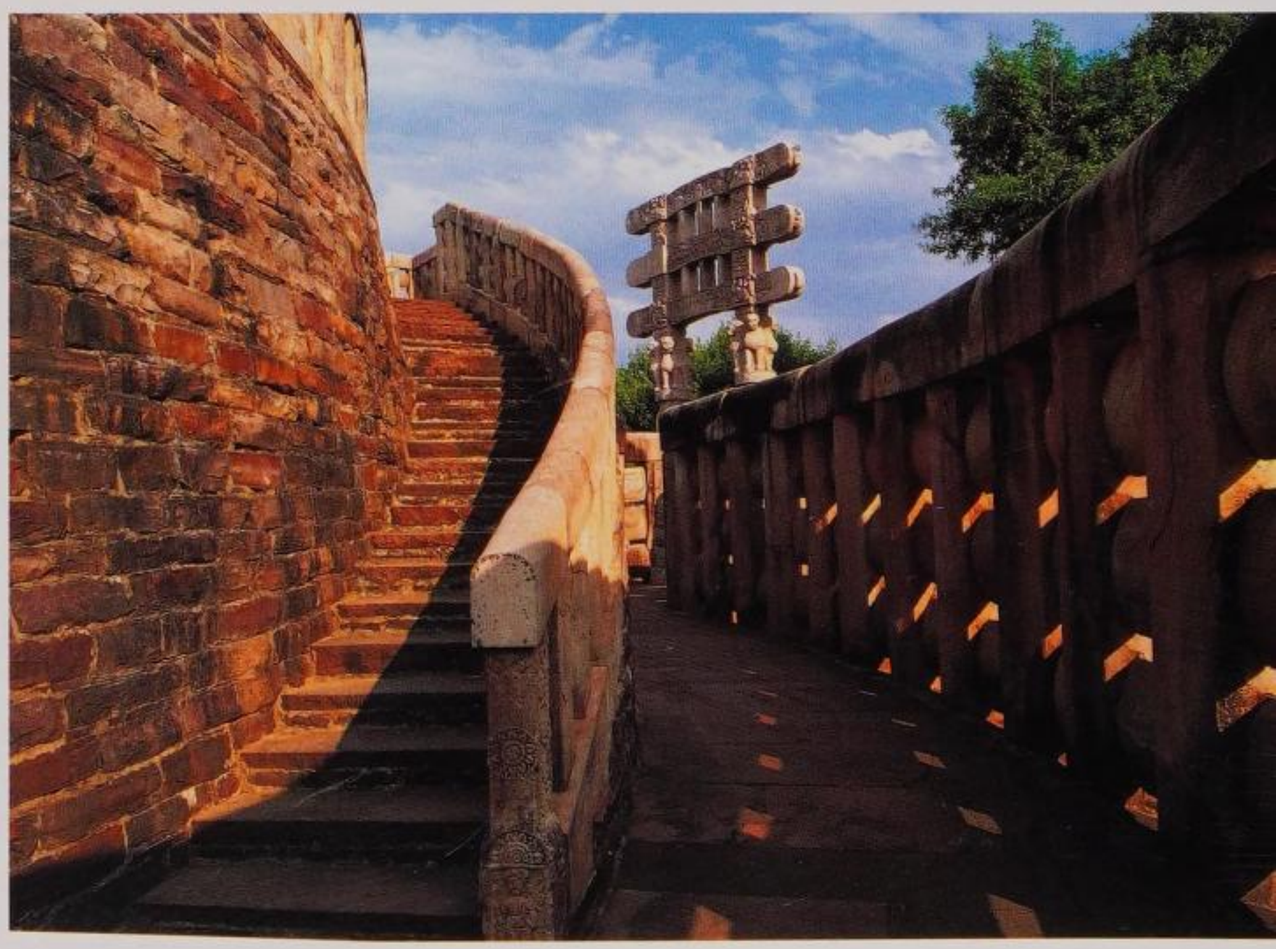
70 - THE EASTERN *TORANA* OF THE GREAT STUPA OF SANCHI IS DECORATED WITH THE ANCIENT MOTIF OF THE *SHALABHANJIKA*: A VOLUPTUOUS BEJEWELED YOUNG WOMAN WITH HER ARMS OR LEGS WRAPPED AROUND A TREE.

71 - THE BEST-PRESERVED *TORANA* OF THE GREAT STUPA OF SANCHI IS THE NORTHERN ONE, WHOSE INNER SIDE WITH RICHLY CARVED ARCHITRAVES IS SHOWN HERE.

The Great Stupa of Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh (also known as Stupa No. 1) is probably the most important surviving monument of ancient Indian Buddhism and dates back to Ashoka's reign. However, its current appearance is the result of subsequent enlargements that encased the primitive mound and were made during the times of the Shungas (the dynasty followed the Maurya in northern India) and the Satavahanas, particularly King Satakarni. It is interesting to note that the Buddha is never represented in human form in early Buddhist art. Instead, his presence is suggested by certain symbols, such as the throne, tree, parasol or footprints.

The statues of the Buddha at the foot of the monument date from the 5th century BC, while the *toranas* of the *vedika* were built in the 1st century AD. The northern gateway of the Great Stupa is decorated with depictions of the events recounted in the *Jatakas* ("Births"), the stories of former lives of the Buddha. The *Jatakas* of Sanchi are very elaborate and detailed, with splendid monumental *yakshas* guarding the gateways, and exquisitely crafted nymphs. The latter, depicted in sinuous and graceful poses beneath flowering trees, are usually situated on the ends of the uprights of the *toranas* beneath the end scrolls of the lintel. Stupa No. 3, which was built during the same period as the Great Stupa, contains the relics of two famous disciples of the Buddha, while Stupa No. 2, dating from 100 BC, houses the remains of later teachers.



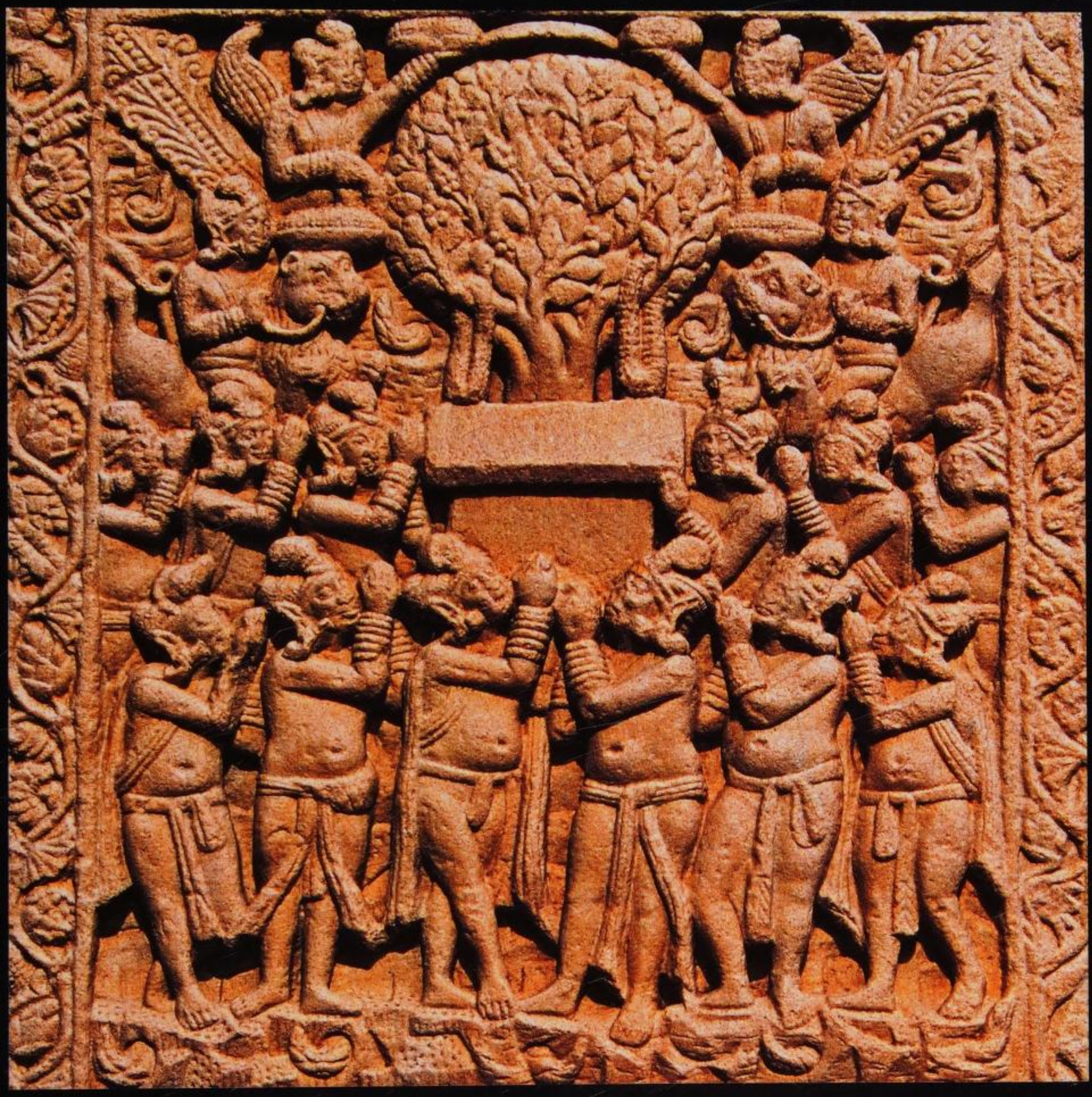


72-73 - The Great Stupa of Sanchi is believed to have been founded by Ashoka (3rd century BC), although its current appearance is the result of subsequent rebuilding.

73 top - The architrave of the northern *torana* of the Great Stupa depicts the adoration of the Buddha (represented as a stupa).

73 bottom - A view of the inside of the ambulatory used for ritual circumambulation and the steps that lead up to the Great Stupa of Sanchi.

74-75 - The *toranas* of the Great Stupa of Sanchi depict the great events of the life of the Buddha and scenes of worldly life.



76 - This panel of a *torana* of the Great Stupa of Sanchi is decorated with beautiful floral motifs alongside two symmetrically placed beaked lions controlled by a single rider.

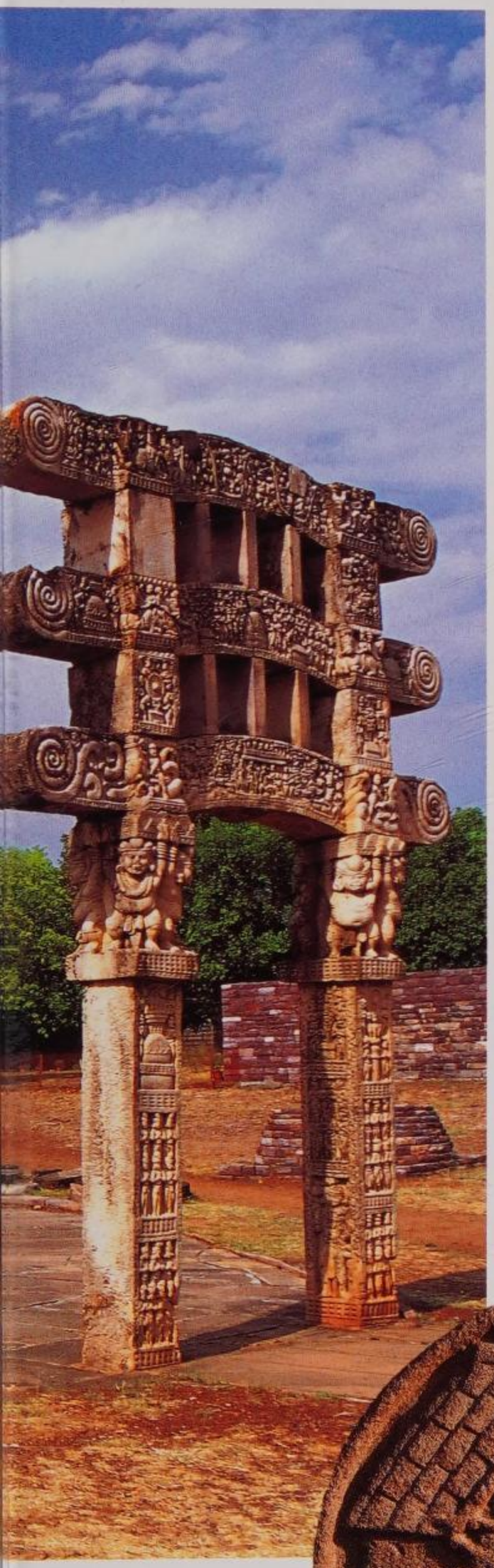
77 - This jamb of the western *torana* of the Great Stupa of Sanchi is decorated with two episodes of devotion and prayer focusing on the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

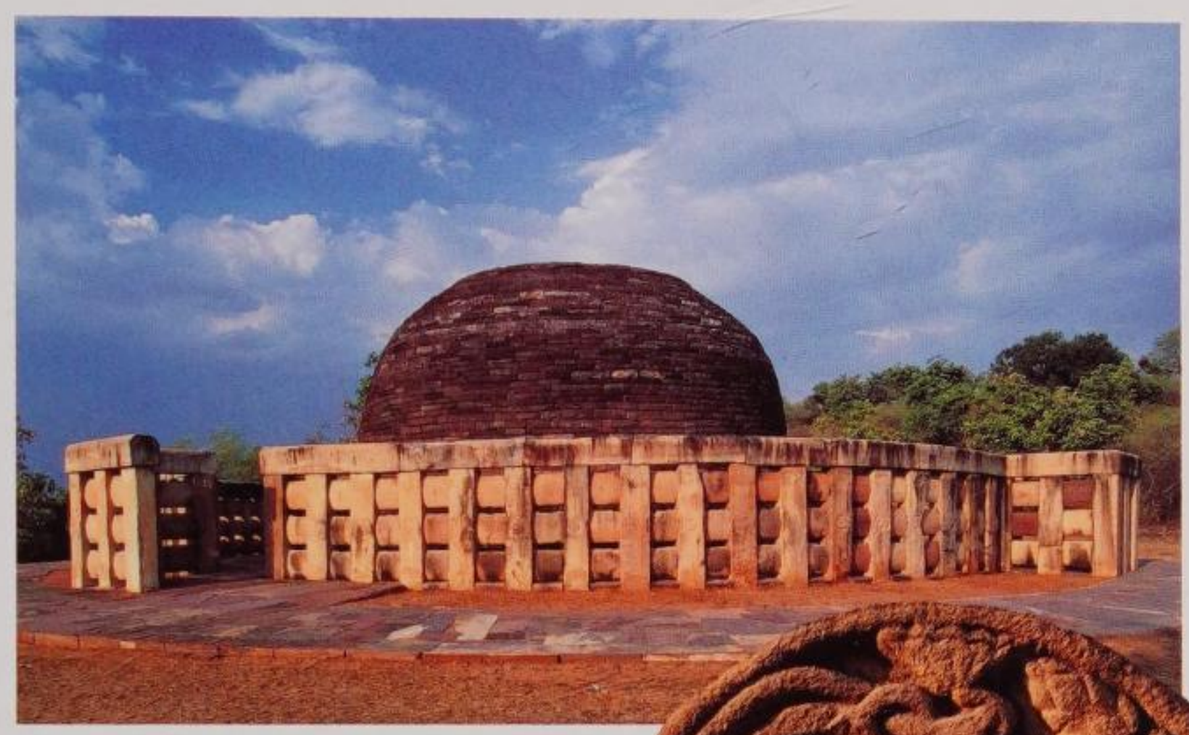
78-79 - Stupa 3 at Sanchi is of great religious significance, for the sarcophagi containing the remains of two important Buddhist saints were found in its reliquary chamber.

79 top - Stupa 2 at Sanchi is situated on an artificial terrace below the summit of the hill. It too dates from the 2nd century AD, although it does not have *toranas*.

79 top center - An elephant is depicted on this roundel of the railing of Stupa 2 at Sanchi, in whose reliquary chamber the remains of great Buddhist teachers were discovered.

79 bottom center - The image of a peacock adorns a roundel of the railing of Stupa 2 at Sanchi. It is believed that the name of the Mauryan dynasty is derived from the term *mayura*, meaning "peacock."





79 BOTTOM - THE RAILING OF STUPA 2 AT SANCHI IS DECORATED WITH ROUNDELS FEATURING FIGURES OF ANIMALS AND PEOPLE AND BEAUTIFUL FLORAL MOTIFS.

However, the most distinctive monuments of Ashoka's reign are probably the monumental pillars erected along the borders of his enormous empire. These freestanding structures, driven into the earth without any foundations, were inspired by Persian art and can be interpreted as an assertion of sovereignty. They are constituted by tall cylindrical shafts topped by bell-shaped capitals identical to the Achaemenid ones known as Persepolitan capitals. These are usually very elaborate and feature one or more animals. While the capitals of the older pillars generally depict a single animal, the famous Sarnath capital, which is also the national emblem of India, portrays four lions. The rigidity and certain stylized details of these animals, such as their manes, are highly reminiscent of Iranian art and contrast with the more naturalistic treatment of the four animals – a lion, an elephant, a bull and a horse – depicted on the abacus, which instead recalls the seals of the Indus Valley civilization.

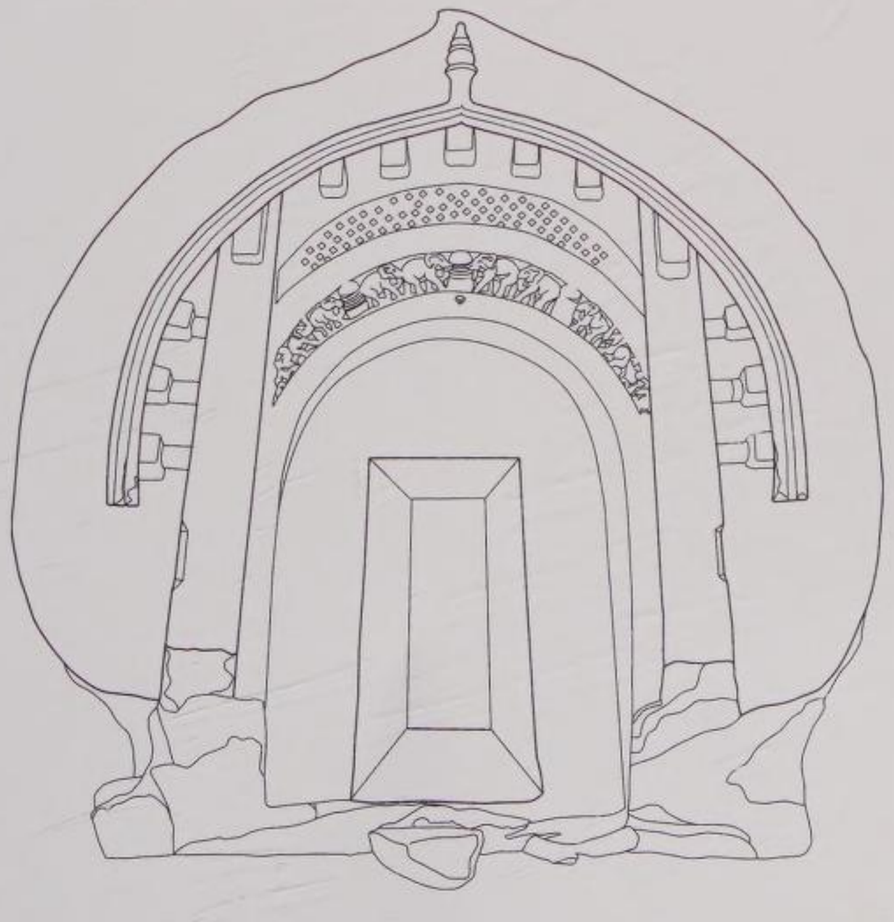
The abacus rests in turn on a bell-shaped element in the form of a stylized lotus flower. The four animals are separated by a wheel motif, which is a symbol of the sun and regality and, in terms of Buddhist iconography in particular, a graphic image of the dharma, the doctrine preached by the Buddha. The animal figures that top the capitals of the pillars of Ashoka combine realistic motifs with other highly stylized ones, testifying to the close contact of the Maurya and Achaemenid empires and probably also to the direct influence of Persepolitan artists who fled eastward after Alexander the Great sacked the city in 330 BC. These bell capitals later developed into the *amalaka*, the round cushion capital of Hindu medieval art, which was often used to crown the convexly tapered *shikhara* towers above the sanctum in northern Indian temples.

The extraordinary burnishing of the sandstone is a peculiar feature of the Ashoka capitals and is also found in the famous Didarganj Yakshi. This life-sized sandstone figure presents us with what was the canon of female beauty of the age, with full, rounded breasts, a very narrow and shapely waist, broad hips, straight and well-rounded legs, and creases on the neck and abdomen. The body, with nude torso, is adorned with jewels – a symbol of wealth, luck and power – while a garment that clings closely to the legs is draped around the thighs. The woman is holding a flywhisk in her hand.

Cave architecture, which was destined to become a distinctive form of Indian art, also commenced under Ashoka. A group of eight caves dating from the time of Ashoka and his successors has been discovered in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills of Bihar. They were probably sites frequented by the Ajivika ascetic sect that developed out of the same spiritual needs that also generated Buddhism and Jainism, although unlike these the sect was destined for a rapid decline. The Lomas Rishi cave is particularly noteworthy for the sculptural decoration of its entrance. Two rows of elephants paying tribute to stupas are depicted in a lunette inserted in an architectural façade with a pointed arch that is evidently derived from wooden architecture.

Following Ashoka's death in 232 BC, the Mauryan empire fell into a final and irresistible decline that continued until 184 BC, when its last king, Brihadratha was murdered by the commander of his army, Pushyamitra, who founded the Shunga dynasty. This marked the end of the first great Indian unification, which had lasted 140 years.

80 - The famous Sarnath capital, which has been adopted as the national emblem of India, is simultaneously a symbol of power, tolerance and cosmopolitanism, following the tradition of government inaugurated by Ashoka (Archaeological Museum, Sarnath).



81 - This drawing shows the entrance of the Lomas Rishi cave. The arch was unknown to Hindu architects until the arrival of the Muslim invaders, and even subsequently the form was copied without an understanding of its architectural role.

THE BREAKUP OF THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

At the beginning of the 2nd century BC the Mauryan empire fell and was subsequently divided up. The northern part was occupied by the Shungas, the Deccan by the Satavahana family, Kalinga by the Chedi dynasty, and the northwestern territories by Indo-Greek invaders.

We know very little of the Shunga dynasty, which ruled for 112 years: it is believed that Pushyamitra was a Brahman and that his seizure of power marked a return to Hindu traditions and rites that were previously banned by Ashoka. The dynasty ended with the murder of its last king, Devabhuti, by his minister Vasudeva who founded the Kanva dynasty. Following 45 years of rule, Vasudeva was defeated by the Andhra kingdom, which became one of the main power centers of central-southern India until the 2nd century AD.

The Shunga dynasty enlarged numerous monumental Buddhist complexes, including that of Sanchi, and built others, such as Bharhut. The Shunga style differs greatly from the Mauryan style: while the latter was deeply influenced by Iranian art, the former revived ancient elements of popular art, emphasizing the native tradition. An example of early Shunga art is represented by the monolithic sculpture of the Parkham Yaksha, an archaic and massive figure adorned according to the fashion of the period with a band around the stomach, a belt and a heavy necklace.

Nonetheless, the most significant features of Shunga art can be seen in the *toranas* and the remains of the railing of the stupa at Bharhut, a village about 10 miles from Satna, in Madhya Pradesh. Less than half of the original railing of this stupa, believed to have measured around 65 ft (20 m) across, has been recovered. The *Jatakas* (stories of previous lives of the Buddha) and the episodes from the life of the Buddha and his cult are extensively treated at Bharhut and for the first time in the history of Indian art inscriptions have been found allowing their certain identification. The most elaborate motifs are concentrated on the inner façade, destined for the exclusive contemplation of devotees. The life-size images of *yakshas*, *yakshis*, *devatas* and other figures reveal the enthusiasm of Shunga sculptors for intricate detailing. The *yakshi* figures are particularly and deservedly famous and include the splendid maiden known as the Chandra Yakshi, who is not only adorned with the usual profusion of jewelry, but also with tattoos on her face

82 - This female figurine is from Chandraketugarh, an archaeological area about 25 miles (40 km) from Kolkata, which is famous for its many beautiful terracotta artifacts (Musée Guimet, Paris).

83 - This horseman from the stupa at Bharhut displays the great power and vigor of Shunga sculpture. The Shunga period was an important one in the history of Indian art, for it witnessed the development of an artistic taste close to popular art (Indian Museum, Kolkata).

and a sophisticated hairstyle. The Bharhut reliefs are also important for their accurate depictions of the architectural settings of many of the scenes and for the information that they contain regarding the life of the period in general. Depictions of Shri Lakshmi, a pan-Indian goddess of wealth and good fortune who became enormously popular in the subsequent cult, have also been found at both Bharhut and Sanchi. Another characteristic shared by the sites of Bharhut and Sanchi is the fact that they were aniconic schools.

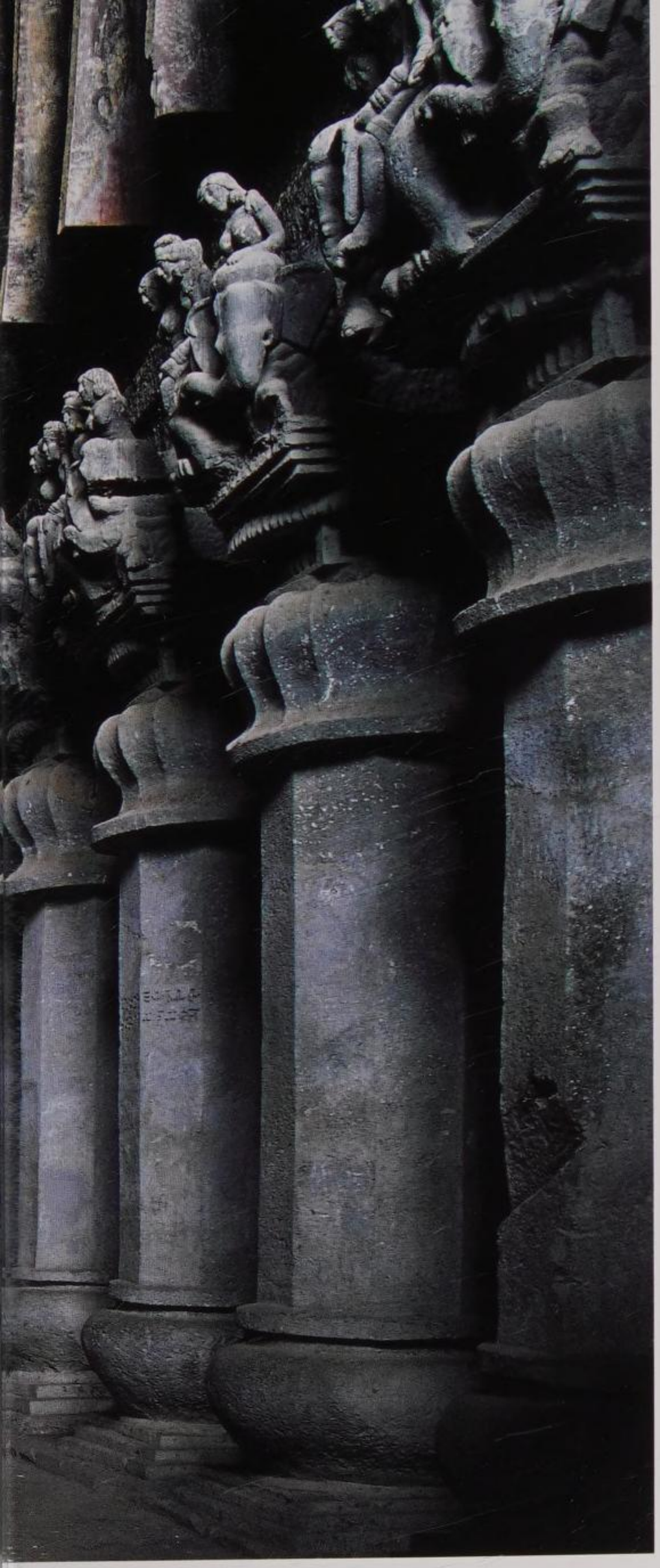
The final stage of Shunga art is illustrated at Bodh Gaya in an image of Surya in his chariot drawn by four horses. The Bodh Gaya sculptors demonstrate greater technical skill than the early Bharhut sculptors, whose style was however more exuberant and lively.

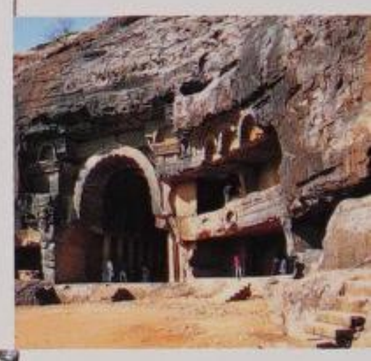
During the brief Kanva dynasty that followed the Shungas, the Magadha area faded out of importance, reverting to its original status of a mere *mahajanapada* among others of its kind. The political center of India had once again shifted northwest, where many foreign dynasties were fighting for supremacy. In 28 BC a ruler of the Satavahana dynasty defeated the last Kanva king.

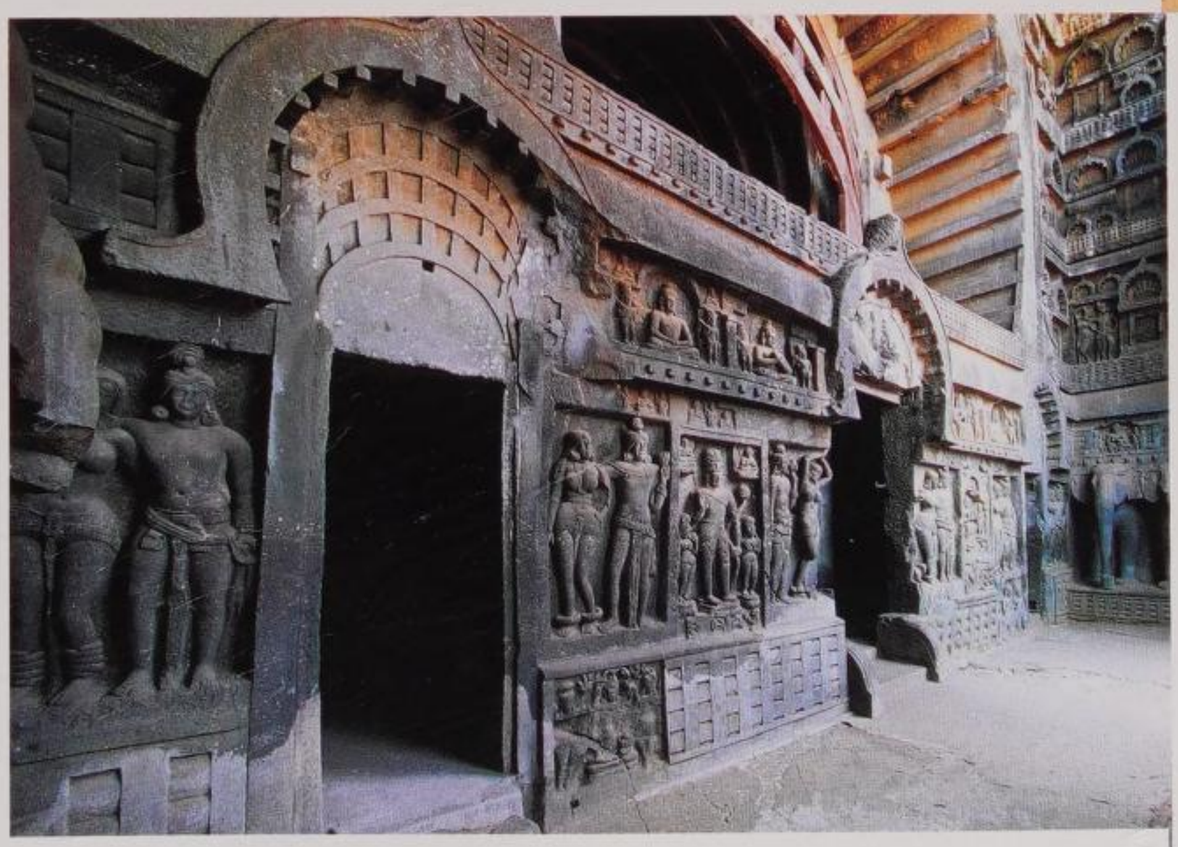
Together with the dynasty of King Kharavela of Kalinga, the Satavahanas (also known as Andhras) were one of the two great ruling families that asserted themselves south of the Vindhya Range following the decline of the Mauryan empire. The great Andhra dynasty, presumably of non-Aryan origin, extended its rule over most of central and southern India between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD, before declining in the 3rd century. The tastes and patronage of the Satavahana kings are exemplified in some of the earliest examples of cave architecture of western India, such as Bhaja, Kondane, Nasik, Karla and Bedsa; in the enlargement and decoration of the buildings at Sanchi; and in the stupa

believe that one of these depicts Indra, the Vedic king of the gods, and the other Surya. The structure of *Chaityagriha* 12 is also particularly interesting, for it is composed of a large apsidal hall separated from two side ones by 27 octagonal columns without bases or capitals from which the ribs of the ceiling rise.

The Karla Caves temple (1st-2nd century AD) is one of the finest examples of cave architecture and its apsidal prayer hall (*chaityagriha*) is undisputedly one of the most beautiful in western India. Its monumental façade is adorned with splendid sculptural groups, voluptuous and auspicious amorous couples (*mithunas*), mythical figures and images of the Buddha. In front of the façade stands a great fluted column with bell-shaped capital, while the side walls of the vestibule bear the signs of a series of four stories supported by a row of mighty elephants resembling the *diggaja*, the mythical elephants of the four cardinal points. Inside, a long row of columns supports a barrel vault with mighty wooden ribs whose function is purely ornamental. The octagonal columns rest on bulbous vase-shaped bases and the bell-shaped capital of each supports two pairs of addorsed elephants, or horses and bulls driven by pairs of lovers.







and the remains of sculptures at Amaravati, the capital of the Andhra kingdom.

Bhaja is one of the oldest examples of a rock-cut monastery, dating from the 1st century BC. Its most important *vihara*, Cave 19, has 2 famous and enigmatic reliefs that are among the oldest surviving examples in Indian art. Scholars

84-85 - The interior of the *chaityagriha* at Karla extends for 165 ft (50 m) and is made even more majestic by the series of imposing, closely spaced columns.

85 left - Reliefs depicting auspicious images of couples adorn the long porch of the *chaityagriha* at Karla.

85 right - This view of the Bhaja caves shows both the Buddhist prayer hall (*chaityagriha*) and the monk's living quarters (*viharas*).

86 - This relief comes from the railing (*vedika*) of the Great Stupa at Amaravati. The *vedika* marks off the area used for *pradakshina*, the ritual circumambulation of the stupa (British Museum, London).

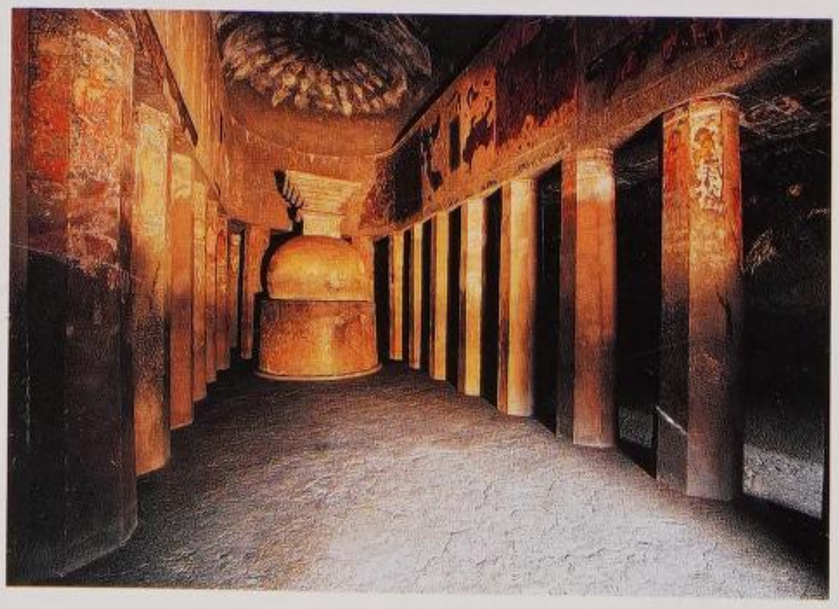
87 - This relief from the Great Stupa at Amaravati depicts the worship of a reliquary (British Museum, London).

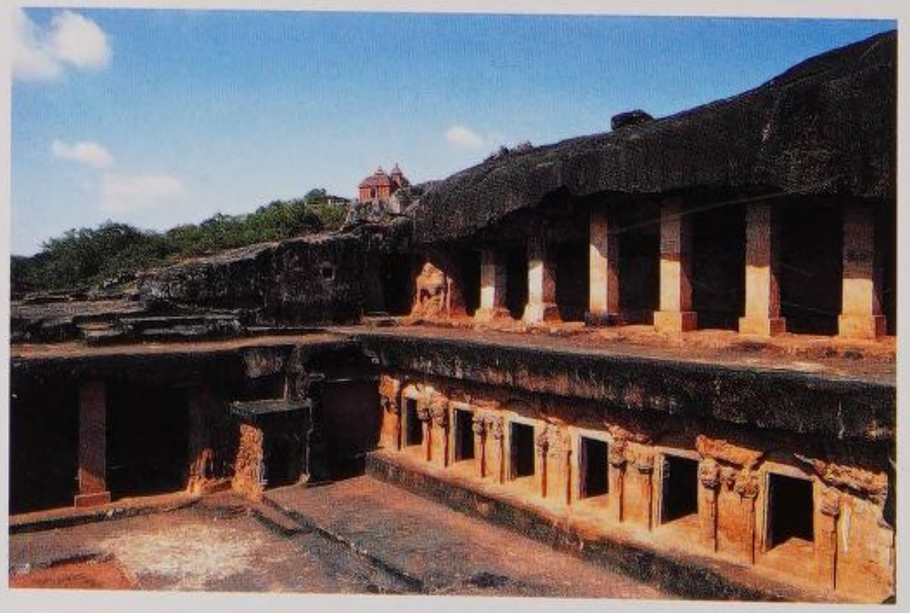
The art of the Satavahanas reached its height between the beginning of the 2nd century AD and the first three decades of the 3rd century in the Great Stupa at Amaravati. Four distinct artistic periods can be identified at Amaravati: the first coinciding with the 2nd century BC, the second with the first century AD, the third corresponding to the building of the railing (150 AD) and the last dating to around the end of the 2nd century AD. These phases display the transition from the evocation of the Buddha with symbols to his representation in human form. The stupa is made from marble and a great staircase once led up to an enthroned Buddha behind which five columns symbolized the transcendental or supreme Buddhas. Here, as at Sanchi, the veneration of the Buddha, also by animals, is aimed at glorifying the spirit of *maitri* and *karuna* (the perfect virtues of sympathy and compassion) toward the Master who moves every living thing. The school of Amaravati was one of the most original, elegant and refined of the ancient Indian schools and the crowded scenes depicted by its sculptors emanate great liveliness and dynamism.

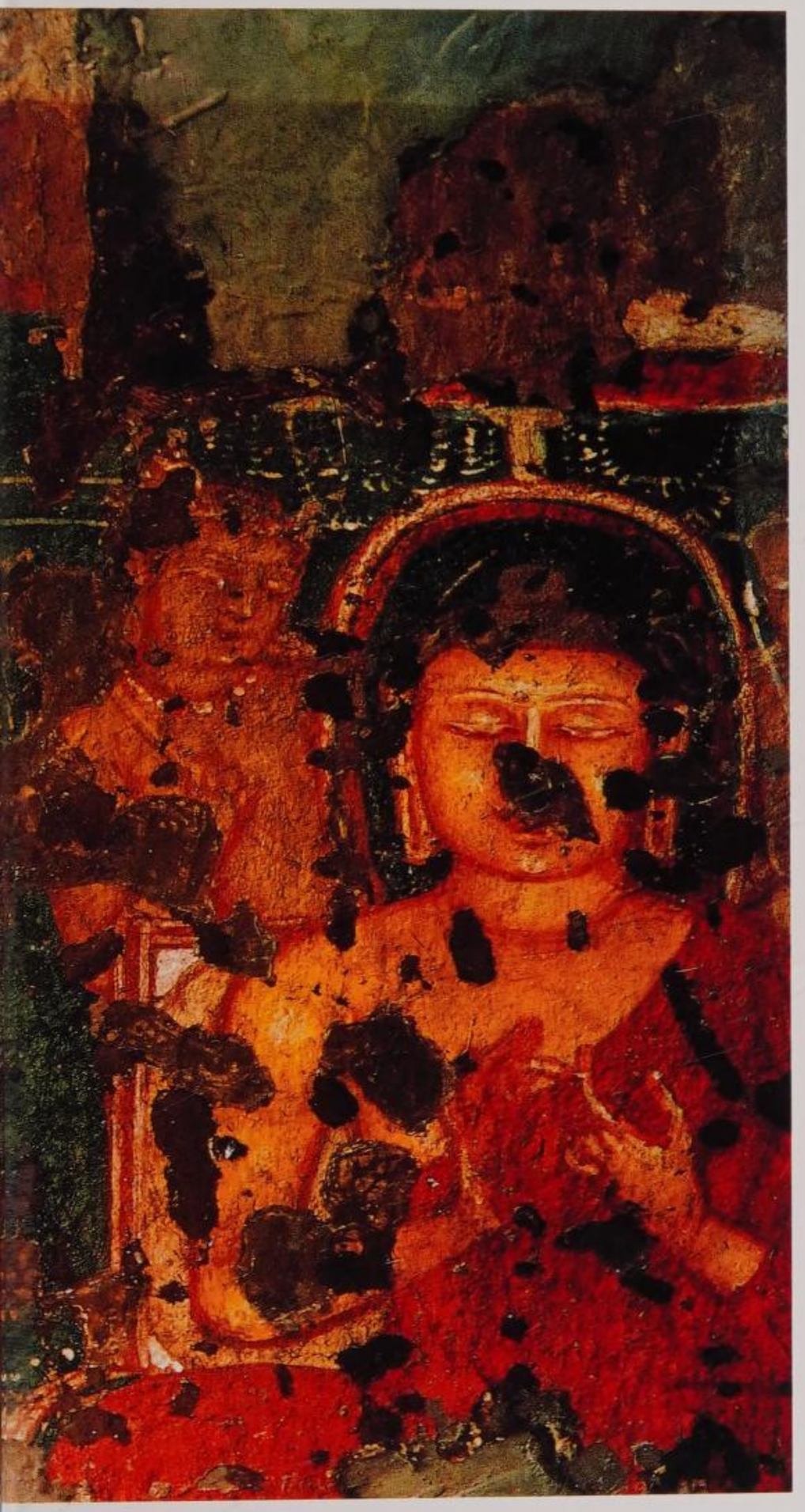
Fantastic animals appear in various forms at Bharhut, Bhaja, Amaravati and Sanchi: bulls, horses, elephants, lions or men with fish tails, or winged lions with beaks. The winged animals usually appear at the top and the fish-tailed ones at the bottom of structural elements.

88 - The Amaravati school of sculpture is characterized by the great liveliness of its scenes (Musée Guimet, Paris).

89 - This relief from Amaravati (1st-2nd century AD) depicts a monarch in a pose of worship (British Museum, London).







The Satavahana school of painting is represented by a few fragments (in very bad condition) from Caves 9 and 10 at Ajanta that, along with the three small *viharas* 8, 12 and 13, date from a period between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD.

Satavahana art was so widespread that extensive finds were recently made in Sannati, in Karnataka, and its extreme ramifications can be recognized as far afield as Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Indonesia.

It is believed that the Kalinga king Kharavela, one of the greatest rulers of ancient India, belonged to the Chedi dynasty. He left a detailed description of his life in an inscription in a Jain cave, the *Hathi Gumpha* ("Elephant Cave") at Udayagiri, near Bhubaneshwar. Kharavela, a devout Jain and a great patron of the arts, ordered the decoration of the Jain caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri, the most important of which are the *Rani Gumpha* ("Queen's Cave") and the *Ganesha Gumpha* ("Ganesh's Cave").

The friezes that decorate the cells depict lively scenes of court life, hunting, or episodes from folklore with candid naturalness.

90-91 - The Ajanta Caves are adorned with wall paintings representing episodes from the *Jatakas*, the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha.

90 bottom left - *Chaityagriha* 9 belongs to the oldest group of the Ajanta Caves, dating from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.

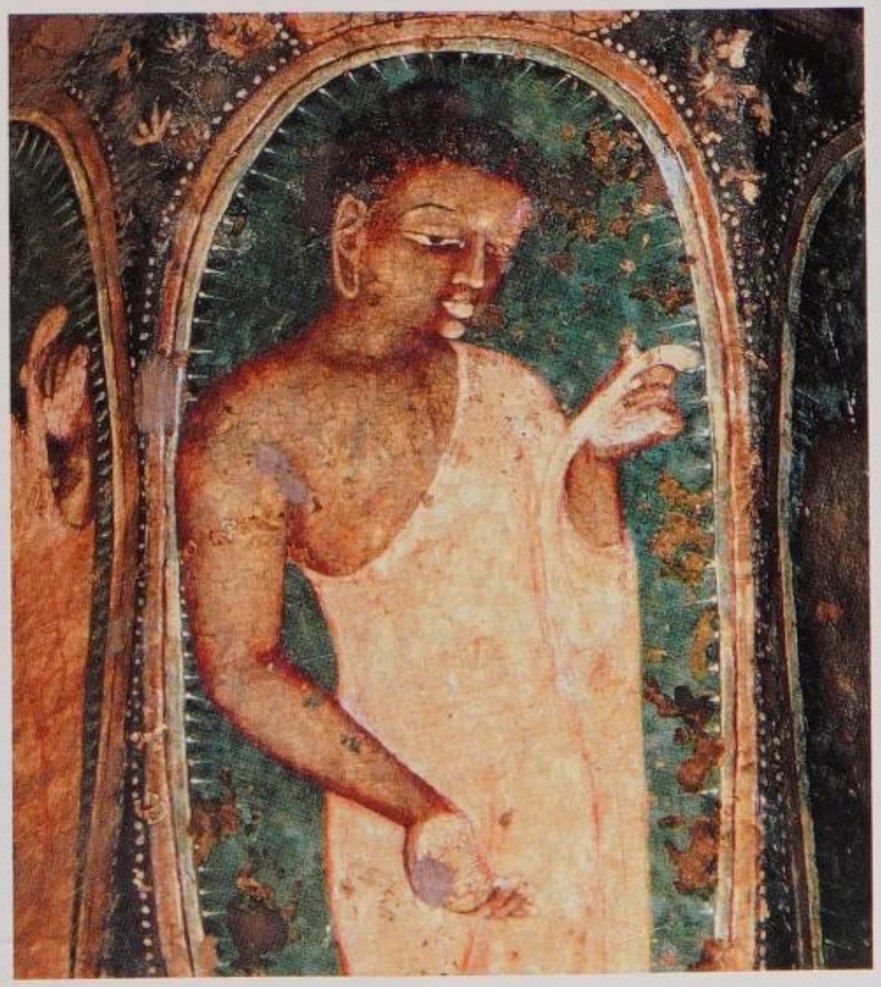
90 bottom right - The village of Udayagiri, five miles from Bhubaneshwar, is famous for the rock temples commissioned by King Kharavela, a devout Jain, and his wife.

91 - Cave 9 at Ajanta, whose façade is shown here, was used as a temple.

92-93 - The barrel vault of *chaityagriha* 10 at Ajanta, where images of the Buddha are alternated with eight-petal lotus motifs.

93 top - The images of the Buddha in Cave 10 at Ajanta are characterized by a great variety of *mudras* (hand gestures used to convey different meanings).

93 bottom - The dominant iconography at Ajanta is that of Mahayana Buddhism, which portrays the Buddha in anthropomorphic form.



While Pushyamitra Shunga was seizing power in Pataliputra, the Indo-Greek king Demetrius came down along the Kabul Valley, occupied Taxila and reached the Indus delta, from where his brother Apollodorus crossed Kathiawar and Gujarat to reach Ujjain. In the meantime, Demetrius' general, Menander, advanced as far as the gates of Pataliputra. The resistance Pushyamitra Shunga offered and the uprising, fomented by the Greek opportunist Eucratides, that had broken out in Bactria in the meantime, caused Demetrius to rush back to his kingdom, where he was killed in the civil war. Eucratides also defeated Apollodorus, while Menander kept his territories situated further east and subsequently became the most illustrious of the Indo-Greek kings. The chronology of Menander's reign is very uncertain, although it appears that his death was followed by several more generations of Indo-Greek rule.

Eucratides' rule, weakened by the continuous wars and succumbing to the Scythians (known in Indian sources as the Shakas) also ended between 141 and 128 BC. The Shakas, along with the Kushans, were the heirs of the Indo-Greek kingdoms of northern India. India's first Shaka king was Maues, who is believed to have ruled between 94 and 22 BC. Under Maues and his successor Azes I the Shaka empire extended to comprise northwestern and part of central India. Although the Shakas conquered the Indo-Greek kingdoms, they nonetheless adopted the Indo-Greek culture culture. However, they were supplanted in turn, around AD 20, by the short-lived Indo-Parthian dynasty founded by King Gondophares, who ruled until AD 46 and is recorded in 3rd-century Christian texts as Gundaphorus, the protector of the apostle Thomas who is said to have brought the message of Christianity to India. In later sources Gondophares is identified with Gaspar, one of the Three Wise Men of the East.

While the Indo-Parthians, Shakas and Indo-Greeks were fighting each other during the mid-1st century AD, a new wave of invaders from central Asia known as the Kushans entered northwestern India and, in a massive campaign of conquest, defeated all the ancient dynasties of the area. Driven by the Kushans, the Shakas reached the region of Malwa around Ujjain, where their kingdoms, also known as satrapies, continued to exist until the end of the 4th century AD. The Kushan dynasty was fairly long-lived, prospering for the first two centuries after the turn of the millennium and, under its greatest king, Kanishka, who ruled around AD 100, comprising the territories between Bactria and Varanasi, Kashmir, the Punjab, Sind, and the cities of Delhi, Mathura and Sanchi.

94 - The Mathura school, of which the sculpture shown here is an example, produced some of the finest and most important pieces of Indian statuary. The city of Mathura was a leading artistic center between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD (Government Museum, Mathura).

95 top - The Kushan Empire was a melting pot of different artistic traditions – Indian, Greco-Roman and Iranian – whose main focus was the city of Mathura. This relief depicting Shiva dates from the Kushan period (National Museum of India, New Delhi).

95 bottom - This silver coin dates from the reign of the Shaka ruler Azes I (British Museum, London).

96-97 - This relief by the Gandhara school depicts the Buddha of the past foretelling the Enlightenment to the future Buddha (private collection).

Along with Ashoka and Menander, Kanishka is considered one of India's greatest Buddhist rulers. He had a cosmopolitan and tolerant nature and the Kushan pantheon comprised Iranian, Hindu, Buddhist and Greek deities. The enormous size of the Kushan empire, which extended beyond the frontiers of India to comprise territories in modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, also made it a meeting place for Indian, Greco-Roman, Iranian and Chinese elements, all of which are recognizable in both its sculpture and its painting. The main focus of the Kushan school of art was Mathura, which was a great artistic center from the 2nd century BC until the end of the 2nd century AD. Indeed, much sculpture produced in the city was sent, by order, to many other areas of the country. The city's production is easily discerned by the characteristic red sandstone streaked with yellow from the nearby Sikri quarries. The Kushan sculpture of Mathura, unlike that of the Gandhara school, is usually free from all Western influences: the famous headless statue of Kanishka, for example, appears to be inspired by the central Asian style and provides interesting information regarding what must have been the royal dress. The most important chapter in Kushan art regards the representation of the Buddha. As mentioned above, the early productions of Sanchi and Bharhut were strongly aniconic and the Buddha was evoked by means of symbols that substituted his person. During Kushan rule, which witnessed the spread of Mahayana Buddhism, the depiction of the Buddha in anthropomorphic guise became popular. However, the representation of the Buddha remains symbolic for he is presented in terms of the Great Cosmic Man, the Universal Sovereign of the Spirit, whose body is marked with 32 signs that characterize his superhuman nature (*lakshana*), including the protuberance on top of his head, the tuft of hair between his eyes and the image of the Wheel of the Law on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet. The

98-99 - The Bagram ivory panels were part of wooden furniture that it is believed may have belonged to a harem (Musée Guimet, Paris).

99 - This panel with two female figures is from Bagram in Afghanistan, a region influenced by the Gandhara school (Musée Guimet, Paris).

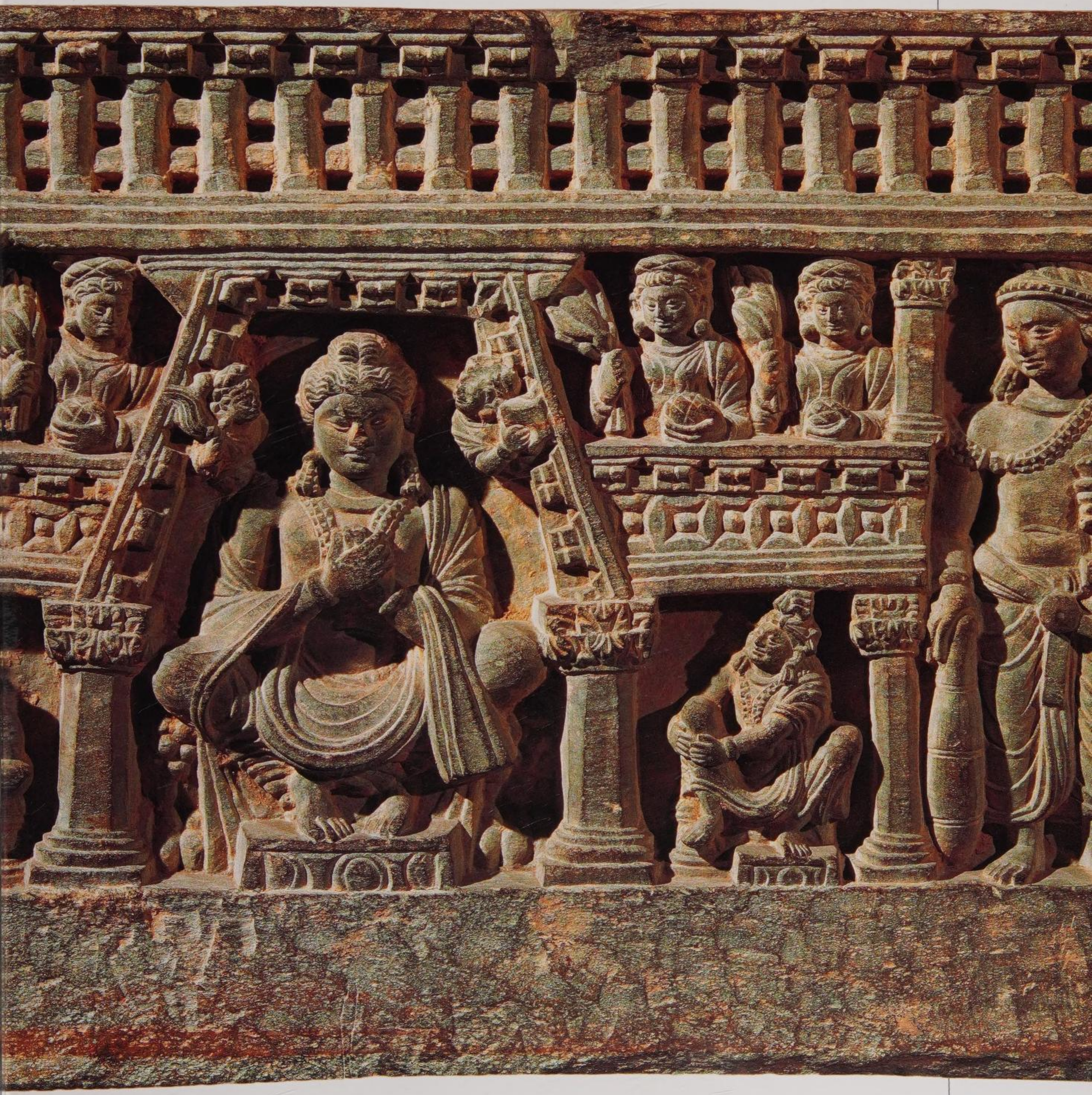
bodhisattvas – those who despite having reached Enlightenment postpone their entrance into Nirvana in order to guide men to salvation – wear princely garments, hairstyles and jewelry to emphasize their continuing bond with the world and their active role. Although some of the Kushan figures of the Buddha are heavy, coarse and almost completely lacking the elegance that they subsequently acquired during the Gupta period, the female figures, such as the *yakshi* from Bhutesar, Shri Lakshmi and the river goddess (*nadi matrika*) bearing food and water in the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi are delightful examples that illustrate the best of Kushan art. One of the most charming figures is the girl with parrot and cage depicted on a pillar of a stupa railing. However, the repertory of the Mathura sculptors not only featured figures of Buddha, but also countless statues of *jinas*, whose main difference from the Buddhas lies in their nudity, as their meditating poses are very similar.

GANDHARA ART

The Gandhara school represents an artistic current that developed in the northwestern region of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent and in part of Afghanistan; it is one whose style is characterized by a very evident adaptation of Greco-Roman forms to Buddhist subjects. The area of diffusion of Gandhara art comprises regions that are usually defined as subject to Indo-Iranian influence, as they have been affected by Iranian cultural currents since prehistoric times. It also partially coincides with the area of extension of the first great Indian civilization, i.e., that of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. The presence of Greek subjects, exiled to this far-eastern area of the Achaemenid empire as a punishment, can be considered the basis for the subsequent Hellenization, which became far more pronounced following the conquest of Alexander the Great and the ensuing rule of the region by Seleucus and his successors. Although the chronology regarding the development of the school is much debated, it stretches from the end of the 1st century BC to the 6th-7th century AD, and survived in some areas of Kashmir until the verge of the 9th century. However, much of the finest Gandhara art dates to the period of rule of the greatest Kushan kings.

The predilection for frontality and rigid, heavy figures were always constant features of the school and cannot thus be attributed to a Roman influence for evident chronological reasons. Frontal images are also present in the Mathura school of Kushan art, thus revealing that frontality, compositions and rigid forms responded to the tastes of the Kushan dynasty. This inclination was partially foreign to the Indian artistic tradition, which uses the frontal figurative convention only exceptionally and, when it is adopted, as in the reliefs at Bharhut and Sanchi, not only does it refuse to give it supremacy – often attenuating it with attempts at torsion or with intermediate devices aimed at indicating a specific spatial depth – but always alternates or associates it with figures that do not respect this figurative scheme.

100-101 - This sculpture depicts the Bodhisattva Maitreya swearing not to abandon the world until the last being has been redeemed from ignorance and pain (Musée Guimet, Paris).

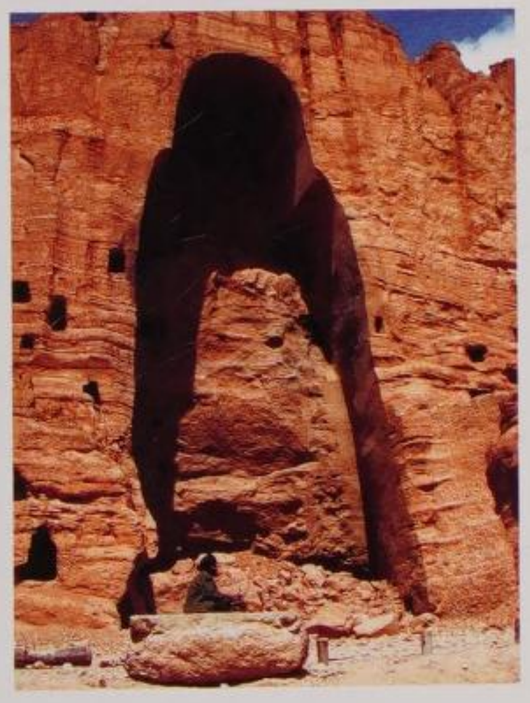


The static, rigid and frontal forms of Gandhara are thus the result of a combination of Kushan aesthetic tastes and the assimilation of influences from Iranian art. Elements of Iranian origin can be seen, for example, in the statue of Kubera in Lahore Museum, whose head and face are very similar in structure to the bronze statue of a nobleman in rider's attire from Shami, now in the Tehran Museum, or in the great schist head of Buddha that displays Parthian characteristics in the arrangement of the volumes and the engraved iris.

In both sculpture and architecture Gandhara art expresses the encounter of classical elements of Greco-Roman origin with Iranian elements and a strong Indian component that is clearly expressed in the religious inspiration that animated the artistic school. Indeed, there are very few examples of heterodox or secular Gandhara art, which appears to be characterized be the desire of its artists to follow the descriptions of the traditional texts in the narration of episodes from the life of the Buddha. From a formal point of view, the Indian influence is limited to certain details of costume and to the essential structures of most of the buildings. In its architectural expression, the Gandhara school uses the Corinthian capital, which becomes more of a recurrent decorative motif than a load-bearing element. Iranian influences are apparent in the use of the Persepolitan capital, present in India since the time of the Maurya dynasty, as both an ornamental motif and to separate different scenes. The octagonal structure of the rooms is of Iranian origin too, although it also has Roman-Byzantine echoes. The Jandial temple at Taxila, dating from the 2nd century BC, is a fine example of the merging of Greek and Iranian styles.

The principal feature of Gandhara architecture, however, appears to be its upward impulse, and indeed the stupas of the region show signs of the process of verticalization that subsequently resulted in the Chinese pagoda. Indeed, the Gandhara stupa rises above the classic hemispherical form by means of the insertion of one or more drums and with the addition of raised wooden structures, while the actual body of the structure features sculptural decoration that was previously limited to the railings and the *toranas*. The Kanishka stupa at Peshawar has a cruciform plan and once consisted of a 245 ft (75 m) high stone structure topped by 13 carved wooden terraces, giving it an overall height of almost 625 ft (190 m). Rock sculpture and architecture, including the now-destroyed Bamiyan Buddhas, constitute an exception to the absolute prevalence of "constructed" architecture.

102 - The Gandhara school, of which this relief panel is an example, was active from the end of the 1st century BC until the 6th or 7th century AD (British Museum, London).



103 - The huge monolithic effigies of the Buddha, which stood 115 and 180 ft (55 m) high in Bamiyan in Afghanistan (right, the site as it appears today), bear witness to the vitality of commercial and cultural exchange in central Asia during the Kushan and Gupta periods.

As explained earlier, the origins of the anthropomorphic figure of the Buddha lie in the Kushan period and practically all Gandhara art is centered on the depiction of the image of the Master. The Gandhara and Mathura schools developed two very different forms of representation of the Buddha: the former depicted the figure in Apollonian terms, while the latter adopted the model of the *yaksha* and the Jain ascetic. While Indian tradition tends not to represent the folds of the garments of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, emphasizing only the hemlines, the classical influence is particularly evident in the heavy Greco-Roman-style drapery worn by the Gandhara Buddhas and bodhisattvas and also in their lineaments, which mirror the ancient Mediterranean ideal of beauty. A peculiar feature of Gandhara artistic expression is constituted by the adoption of a kind of "revolving" perspective. This offers worshippers engaged in the ritual circumambulation of the stupa a full 160-degree view. The use of this compositional device allows a far longer fruition time thus permitting the contemplation of the worshipper moving along a bounded architectural path to be extended for as long as possible. This prolonged appeal to the spectator's attention requires the deformation of the image on a plane in order to give the illusion of a perfect representation according to the movement of the beholder.

104 - This head of the Buddha, which combines Indian and Greek elements, was carved between the 1st and 5th centuries AD, and is a splendid example of Gandhara art (British Museum, London).

105 - This bodhisattva figure shows a clear classical bias in the heavy drapery of the Greco-Roman-style garment and the realistic rendering of the hair (British Museum, London).

4

THE GUPTA EMPIRE (AD 320-510)

Gupta History and Art
page 108

The Hindu Deities
page 128

The Great Epics
page 142

The years between the ascent to the throne of Chandragupta I and the final defeat of the Gupta army at Eran by central Asian invaders represent a period of extraordinary culture flowering that involved both the sciences and the arts and literature.

The Gupta era commenced with Chandragupta I (AD 320-335), who married Kumaradevi, a princess of the influential Licchavi tribe that controlled most of the northern part of modern-day Bihar, bringing prestige to his own dynasty and proclaiming himself *Maharajadhiraja*, ("Great King of Kings"). After inheriting a stable nucleus of power in the eastern-central Ganges Valley from his father, Chandragupta's son, Samudragupta (AD 335-375) set about expanding the frontiers of his empire. The feats of Samudragupta, considered one of the greatest military leaders in history, are recounted in an inscription on an ancient Ashoka pillar in Allahabad. The inscription narrates that Samudragupta amassed an impressive series of victorious military campaigns that not only led his empire to conquer the entire Ganges Valley except for the Punjab, but also to subjugate several Indian kingdoms. His imperial ambitions drove him as far afield as southern India, where he nonetheless contented himself with the rich spoils.

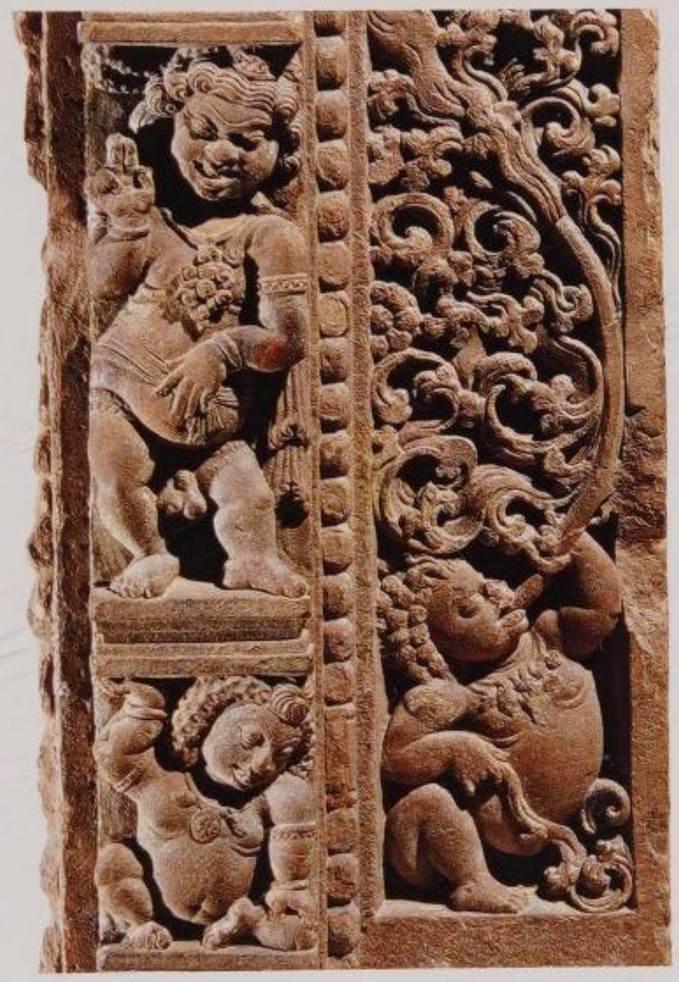
Samudragupta chose Pataliputra as the capital of his empire, testifying to his wish to emulate the Maurya dynasty's attempt at unifying the subcontinent. He was not only a skilled conqueror, but also an expert lyrist and a discerning aesthete, whose qualities are extolled in an inscription that commemorates him as a lover of art and literature.

Samudragupta was succeeded by Chandragupta II (AD 375-415), who defeated the powerful Shaka dynasty and annexed its prosperous kingdom in Gujarat, whose ports were important trade hubs. The Gupta empire reached its greatest territorial limits under Chandragupta II, who also extended his influence over a vast area of central India by the marriage of his daughter Prabhavati to Rudrasena II, king of the Vakatakas.

107 - This head of the Buddha dates from the Gupta era (Musée Guimet, Paris).

108 - This Gupta statue depicts the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

Following the fall of the Satavahana empire in the 3rd century AD, the Vakatakas had acquired great political and strategic importance. In AD 390, Rudrasena II died after a very short reign and Prabhavati acted as regent for her two sons, aged five and two. The period of Prabhavati's rule lasted for 20 years, during which time the Vakataka kingdom became an appendage of the Gupta empire. Under Pravarasena II (AD 410-440), the Vakatakas reasserted their independence, although they still maintained warm and friendly relations with the Guptas. The alliance between the Guptas and the Vakatakas contributed to diffusing the principles of the Gupta political system, whose empire later became a model for India's medieval kingdoms. The center of the empire was constituted by the area under the direct administration of the royal offices, while the bordering lands were obliged to pay a tribute. The areas inhabited by tribes were not required to pay any tax and it was considered appropriate to maintain regular diplomatic relations with independent monarchs. The Gupta era reached its height under Chandragupta II, whose court was home to the "Nine Jewels," the leading intellectuals of the day, including the literary genius Kalidasa, who produced the greatest Sanskrit masterpieces. Literature in general flourished during the Gupta era. One of its finest expressions is the *Panchatantra*, a collection of fables intended to teach readers the principles of politics through stories with animal characters. Chandragupta II's love of art is testified by several coins that depict him seated holding a lotus, symbolizing his knowledge of aesthetics, or in the company of the goddesses Sarasvati and Lakshmi, the guardian deities of learning and the arts and of wealth and good fortune respectively.



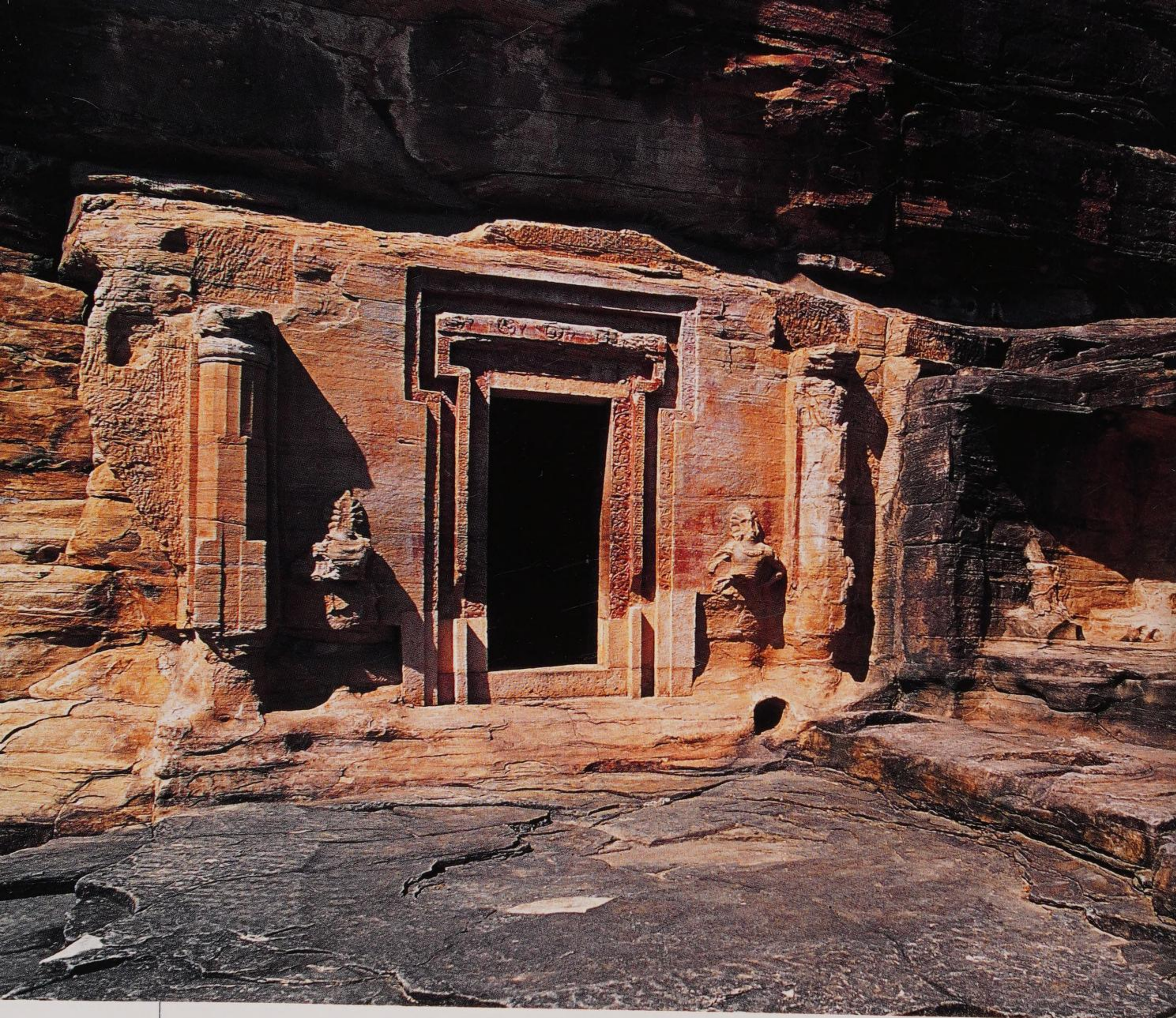
The Gupta era was a fortunate period for northern India's many merchant corporations and craft guilds, as well as for the imperial economy: the Gupta state owned all the salt and metal mines, the land around the capital and various industrial enterprises. Peasants were obliged to give a quarter of their harvests to the state, pay various taxes and work one day a month on the upkeep of the roads, wells and irrigation systems. However, agricultural production during the period flourished and was thus able to meet the demands of this heavy taxation. At the same time the caste system became more rigid, with the principal effect of embittering relations between caste and non-caste members. Indeed, contemporary travelers' accounts reveal that that the latter were subject to great discrimination.

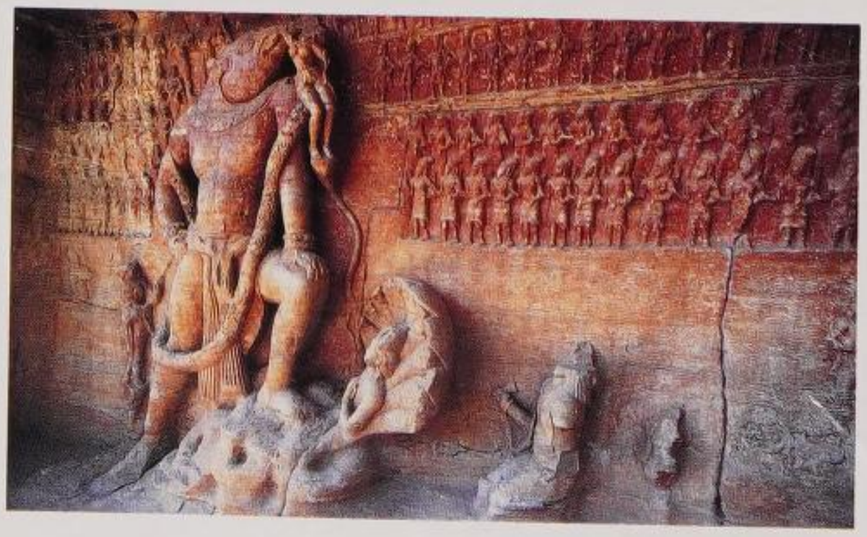
Although the Gupta emperors were Hindu, they nonetheless extended generous patronage to works of art and monuments belonging to the three great religions of the period: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The crown also bestowed donations on all the religious congregations in the form of gold for the Buddhist monasteries and land or yields of entire villages for the Brahmans. While Buddhism was experiencing a decline, Hinduism was thriving on the special favor of the dynasty. The iconography of the deities of the Hindu pantheon was established during the Gupta era, which represents the "classical age" of Indian art history, one whose models were continuously reworked during the subsequent centuries.

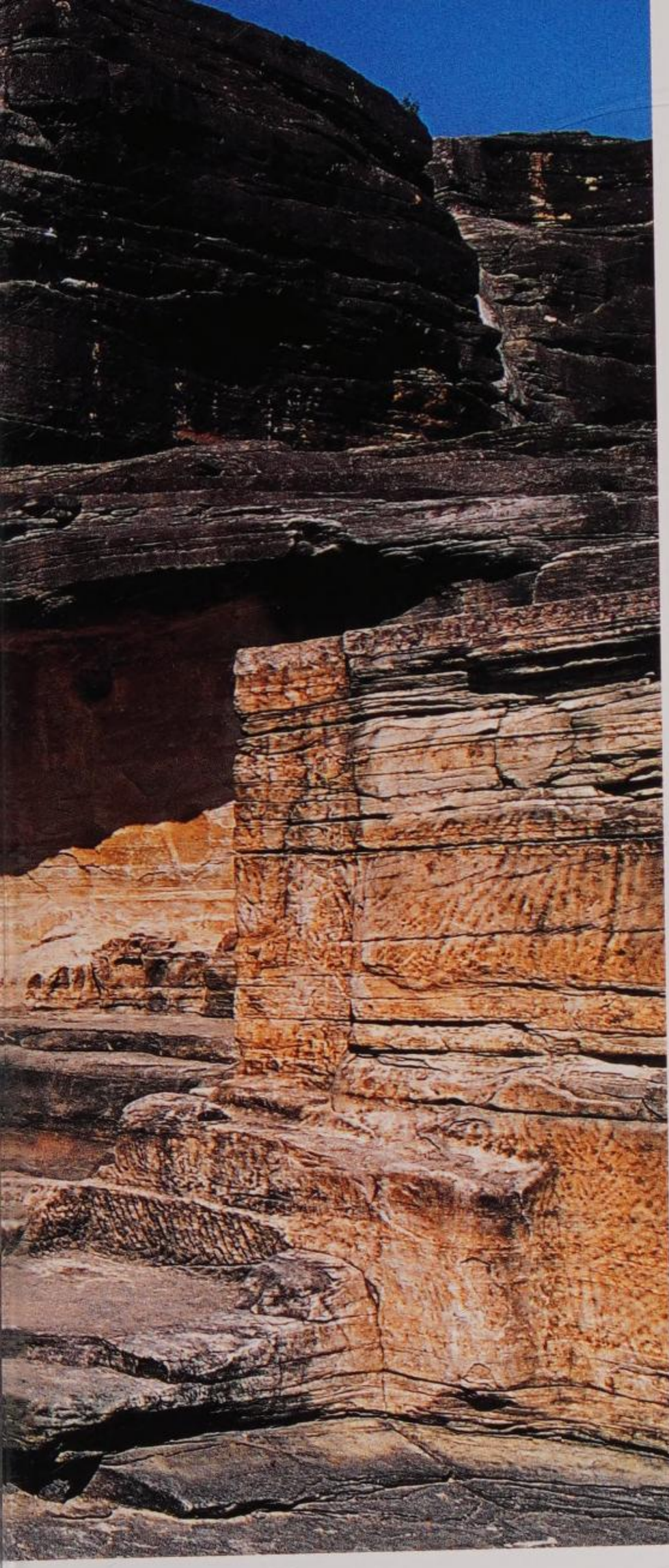
109 TOP - THIS SANDSTONE FRAGMENT OF A DOORJAMB FROM THE GUPTA ERA IS DECORATED WITH ELABORATE NATURALISTIC GEOMETRIC MOTIFS AND FIGURES OF *YAKSHAS*.

109 BOTTOM - THE FIRST GUPTA EMPERORS MINTED A SERIES OF GOLD COINS (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDIA, NEW DELHI AND BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON).

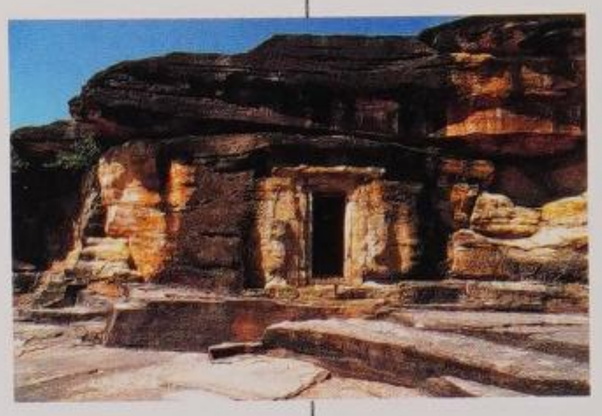
Leabharlanna Poiblí Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Public Libraries

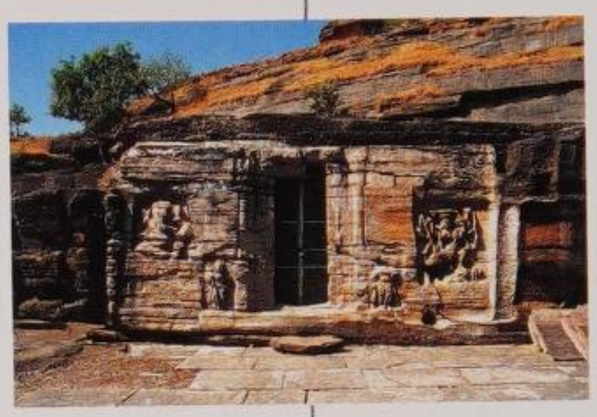


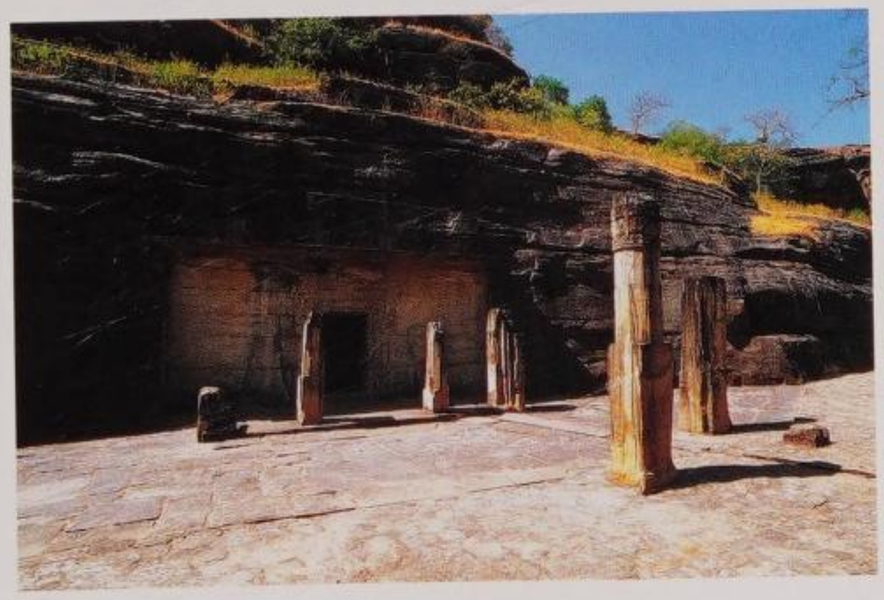




One of the earliest cave temples of the period can be found in Udayagiri, a village near the ancient Buddhist complex of Sanchi. These 20 caves were cut out of the rock during Chandragupta II's campaign against the Shakas and, according to the inscriptions in Caves 5 and 6, were consecrated in the presence of the ruler in AD 402. The Hindu temples are decorated with reliefs and their entrances adorned with figures of the goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. Cave 5, the most important of the entire complex, houses a splendid relief depicting the Boar (Varaha) – the second of the god Vishnu's incarnations (avatars) – raising the Earth from the ocean. The *Mahabharata* tells how, during the Krita *yuga* (cycle of time), the Earth started to sink into the waters, weighed down by the multitude of living creatures that never died, but continued to reproduce. The Earth thus appealed to the god Vishnu who, benevolent and compassionate, took the form of a boar. The animal reached the deepest part of the ocean and raised the Earth out of it, with great rejoicing by the sages and the gods. At Udayagiri there is also an architrave with an image of the goddess Lakshmi and a scene depicting the myth of her birth, when she rose from the churning of the milky ocean by the *asuras* and *devas* seeking the elixir of immortality.







110-111 - The complex of cave temples – partly Jaina and partly Brahmanic – at Udayagiri dates from the Gupta era (4th-6th centuries AD).

110 bottom left - The relief in Cave 5 at Udayagiri depicts Varaha, the boar, raising the Earth from the ocean.

110 bottom right - The relief in Cave 13 at Udayagiri shows Vishnu sleeping in the coils of the serpent Shesha.

111 top - Udayagiri in the modern-day state of Madhya Pradesh, not far from Sanchi, is home to a series of cave temples dating from the Gupta era, such as Cave 3 shown here.

111 center - The niches either side of the entrance of Cave 17 at Udayagiri house statues of Ganesha (on the left) and the goddess Durga slaying the buffalo demon (on the right).

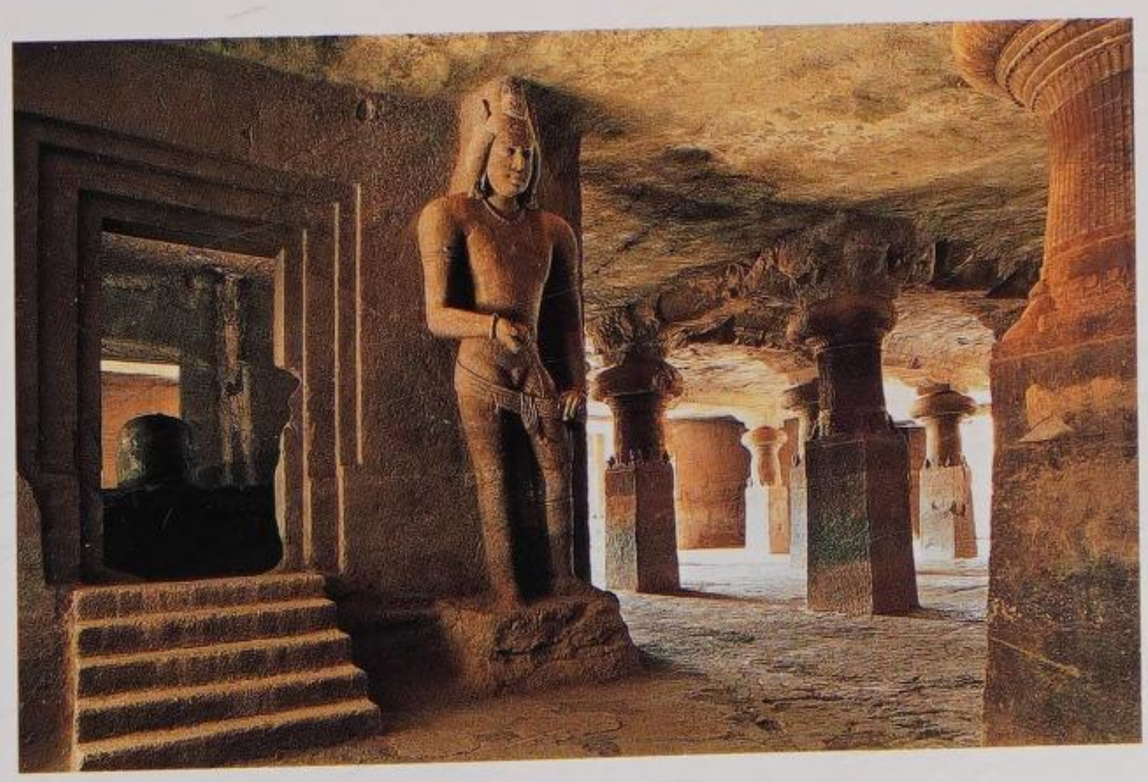
111 bottom - During the period of the Gupta Empire, temples were both carved out of rock and built from brick and stone.

The iconography of Shiva was explored by the artists of Elephanta, a small island a few miles from Mumbai (Bombay). The island was given its name by the Portuguese, who sighted an enormous statue of an elephant there immediately after landing, and is home to a series of caves. The most important of these is Cave 1, cut out of the western hill of the island by the Vakatakas. It is a large cave, about 130 ft (40 m) wide, situated at the top of a long flight of steps. Four vestibules surround the central pillared hall, while six rows of six fluted columns with bulbous capitals appear to support the ceiling.

The Shiva shrine, at the heart of the cave, has four doorways flanked by pairs of beautiful door guardians (*dvarapalas*), aligned with the four cardinal points. Monolithic panels run around the entire wall of this main shrine, housed in niches with a pillar at each side. Clockwise, the first panel shows Shiva Nataraja ("Lord of the Dance") performing the *tandava* dance with which he destroys and restores the worlds. Shiva Nataraja's wife Parvati accompanied by her attendants, the god Brahma with his flock of swans, and the god Vishnu and other deities watch the scene. To the right of Shiva Nataraja is a fine sculptural figure of Ganesha, with two arms and a naturalistic elephant's head with a broken tusk and holding a broken ax.

The successive panel depicts Shiva Andhakasuravadhamurti, the destroyer of the demon of darkness and illusion. While the gods hold a crown on his head to celebrate his feat, he is shown impaling the demon Andhaka with a trident. Shiva is depicted as sinister and fierce in this *murti* (form). The next panel portrays Shiva's marriage to the shy Parvati, accompanied by her father Himavat, the personification of the Himalayas, and her mother Mena. The following scene depicts Shiva Gangadhara, illustrating the myth of the descent to Earth of Ganga, whose power and majesty are mediated by Shiva's hair, thus preventing the river goddess from submerging the world. The goddess Ganga is shown here as a three-headed mermaid to indicate her triple course. A frowning Parvati jealously watches the scene. The three-faced image of Shiva, Sadashiva, is very famous. This impressive relief, over 16 ft (4.8 m) high with a pedestal about 3 ft (0.9 m) high, is a bust of the god. The central face has a kind and peaceful expression, while the two side ones depict the terrible Bhairava and the charming androgynous Vamadeva.

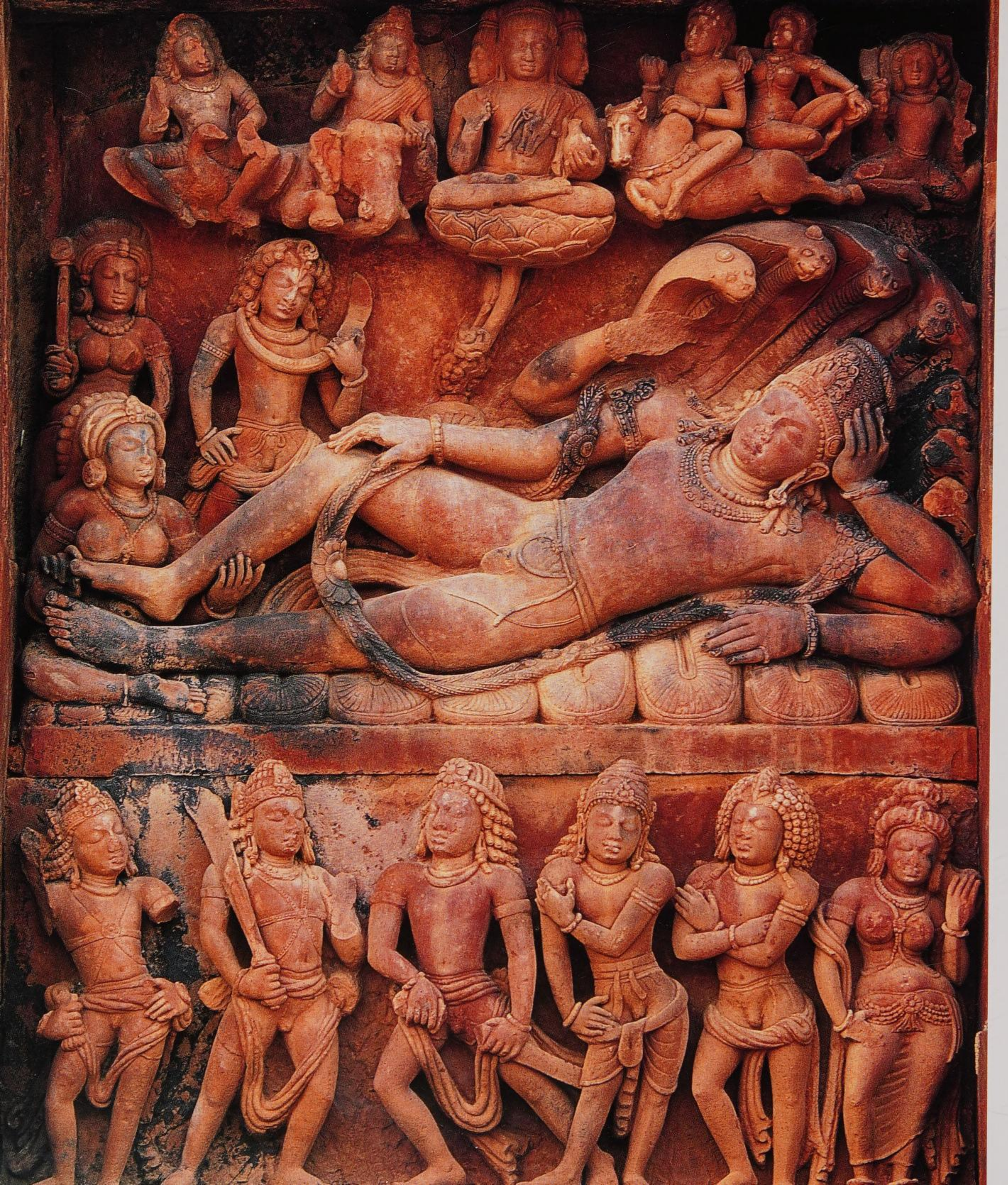
The Ardhanarishvara panel depicting the androgynous union of Shiva and his consort in one body, half male and half female, is also splendid. The reliefs showing the triumph of Parvati in the game of dice and Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa, the divine abode of Shiva, however, are badly damaged. The series is concluded with Shiva Yogeshvara, shown in deep meditation.

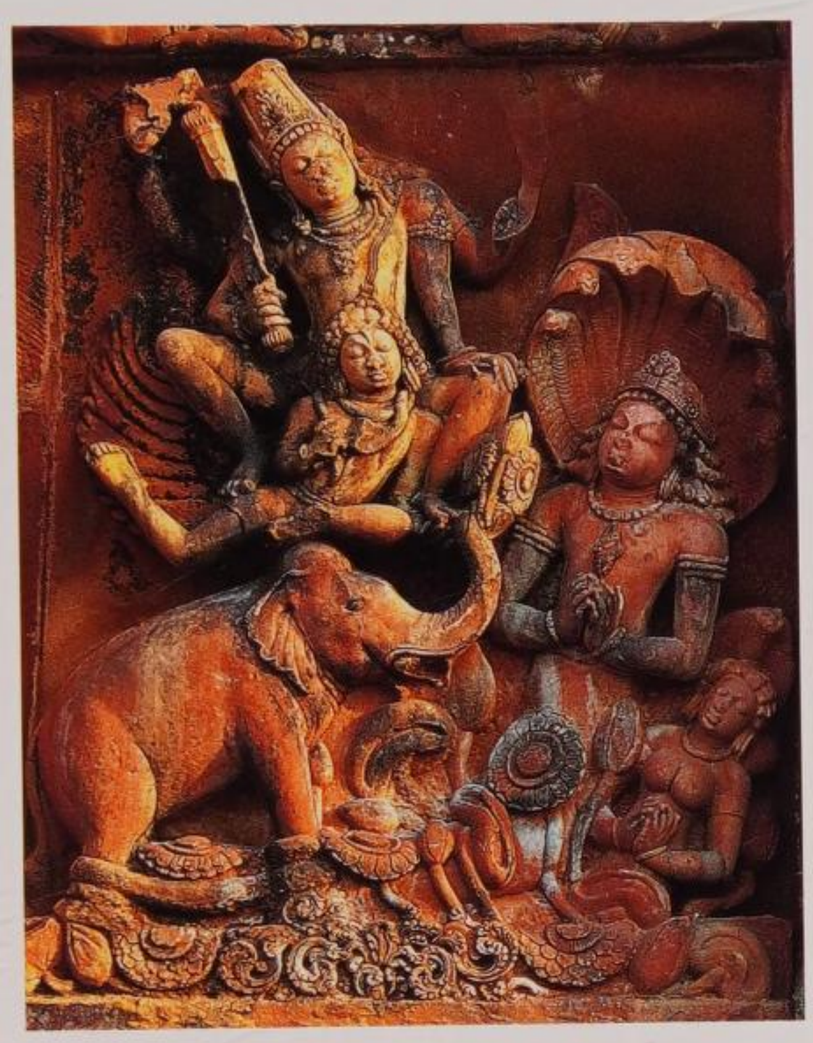


112 - This relief depicting a *dvarapala* (door guardian) is situated near the three-headed bust of Shiva in the Elephanta Caves. *Dvarapalas* are usually located in the lower parts of the doorjambs.

112-113 - The heart of the Elephanta Caves is the Shiva shrine, constituted by a cubic cella with four entrances, each of which is preceded by steps and flanked by monumental figures of guardians 15 ft (4.5 m) tall and generally accompanied by dwarf attendants.

113 bottom - The *linga* is housed in the Shiva shrine. In Shaivite temples the *linga* usually rests on a pedestal symbolizing the *yoni*, the female sexual organ, which represents Shakti, the divine power.

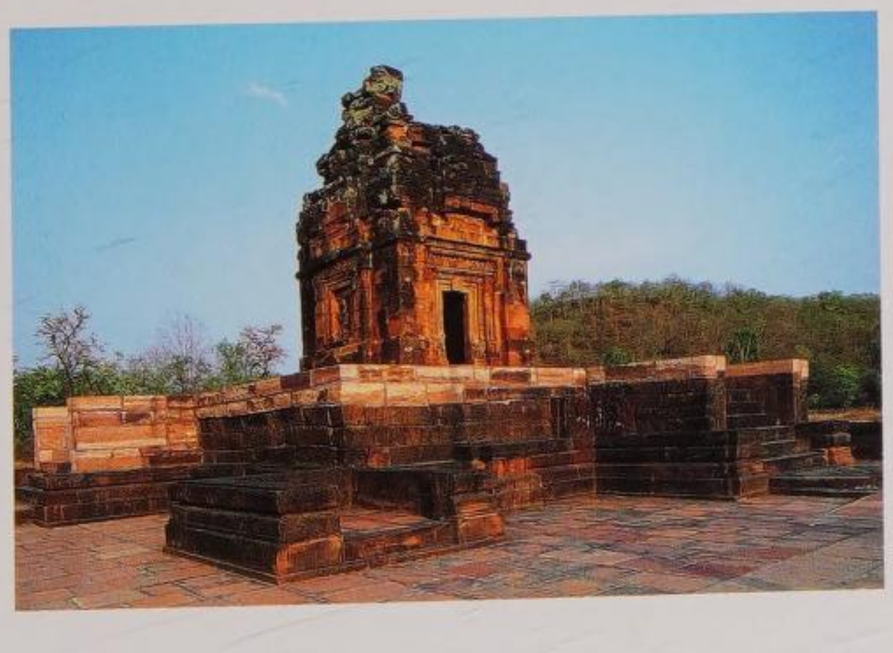


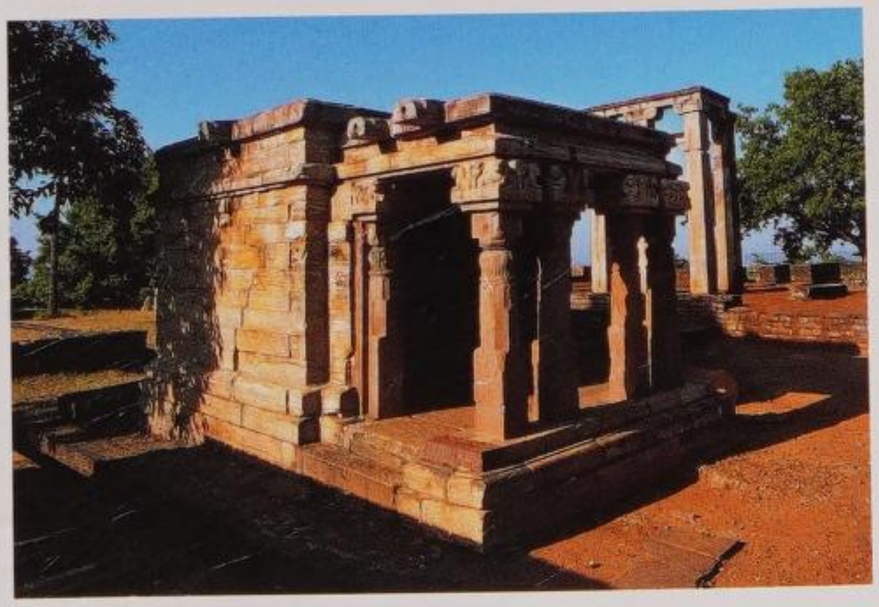


The earliest stone temples were built during the Gupta era. They are usually fairly small and have a main sanctuary, a porch, a small veranda and a hall with columns. Decorative features of the entrance include sculptures of *mithunas* (amorous couple) and *ganas* (dwarfs), *kalpavriksha* and *kalpavalli* motifs (the wish-fulfilling divine tree and creeper respectively), the *purnakhumba* motif (the brimming vase of plenty) and the representation of the goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. In the successive development of the Hindu temple in northern India Ganga and Yamuna are situated at the base of the doorposts and can be recognized by their animal mounts: the water monster known as a *makara* for Ganga and the turtle for Yamuna.

The Dashavatura temple, i.e., that of Vishnu, He who manifests himself on Earth in ten incarnations, at Deogarh is the largest and most elaborate shrine of the period. The sanctum rests on a platform decorated with reliefs depicting episodes from the lives of Rama and Krishna, Vishnu's two most popular and best-loved avatars. The outer walls of the temple are also richly decorated and boast a splendid panel depicting Vishnu sleeping in the coils of the serpent Shesha. The scene, which comprises much of the Hindu pantheon, refers to the moment of suspension that occurs between the disappearance of a universe and the birth of the successive one, with Shesha representing the vestiges of the destroyed universes that remain when the power of creation dissolves during the divine night. It is believed that the sanctuary was originally surrounded on each side by four porches and surmounted by a tall superstructure, which is now partially collapsed.

Temple 17 at Sanchi was also built during the Gupta era and is a typical example of a 5th-century sanctuary with hall form, preceded by a colonnaded porch and topped with a flat roof.





114 - This relief from the temple at Deogarh depicts Vishnu Anantashayin: the god sleeping in the coils of the serpent Shesha (also known as Ananta) at the end of a cosmic Era.

115 top - This relief from the Dashavatara temple at Deogarh depicts Vishnu hastening to save an elephant whose foot is trapped in the jaws of a sea monster.

115 bottom left - The Dashavatara temple is dedicated to the god Vishnu.

115 bottom right - Temple 17 at Sanchi is one of the earliest examples of a Hindu temple.

116 - This statue of the Buddha dates from the Gupta era and depicts the Enlightened One with his fingers interlaced and setting the Wheel of the Law (*dharmacakrapravartana*) in motion, and his legs crossed in the lotus position (Archaeological Museum, Sarnath).

117 - This head of the Buddha from the Gupta period demonstrates the great refinement of Gupta depictions of the Enlightened One, which reached their height during this period (British Museum, London).

The Gupta temples of Uttar Pradesh were built from terracotta and their decorative panels concur to enrich the Hindu iconographic repertoire. The first depiction of Shiva Dakshinamurti, the divine Master who teaches the principles of the faith with silence, is from Ahicchatra.

Another interesting depiction of Shiva comes from Parel (Mumbai), where it was sculpted by the Vakataka school. It shows the god as a musician, with his body composed of the seven musical notes, and *ganas* (dwarfs) playing flutes, *vinas* (stringed instruments) and other instruments at his feet.

In addition to the numerous depictions of Hindu deities and episodes from their mythology, the image of Buddha also reached its aesthetic culmination during the Gupta era. The two centers of sculptural production were Mathura and Sarnath, and indeed the splendid honey-colored sandstone Buddha that represents the height of Gupta sculpture is the work of an artist from the latter city. The Buddha is portrayed during prayer, as is clear from the position of his hands and his posture, seated cross-legged on a throne beneath which the Wheel of Dharma is depicted edge-on. Behind his head is a huge halo, a recurrent motif in the art of the Gutpa school. His head has the usual protuberance, his earlobes are elongated to touch his neck, the snail curls of his hairdo are wound auspiciously toward the right, and his fingers are joined by a membrane. Two heavenly figures rest either side of the halo, while the relief on its outer part features foliage motifs.

Another very similar halo accompanies the Buddha depicted on the stelae outside the Great Stupa of Sanchi, which also dates from the Gupta era. While the monastic robe of the Mathura Buddhas covers both shoulders and is rippled with folds, it is practically invisible in the Sarnath figures. The huge metal Sultanganj Buddha housed in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Britain) is another fine example of Gupta art. Images of Buddha from this period generally feature a full round face, high arched eyebrows tapering toward the temples, half-closed eyes with large eyelids, and a soft, slim body without any kind of sexual connotation. The Master's expression exudes serenity and great composure.

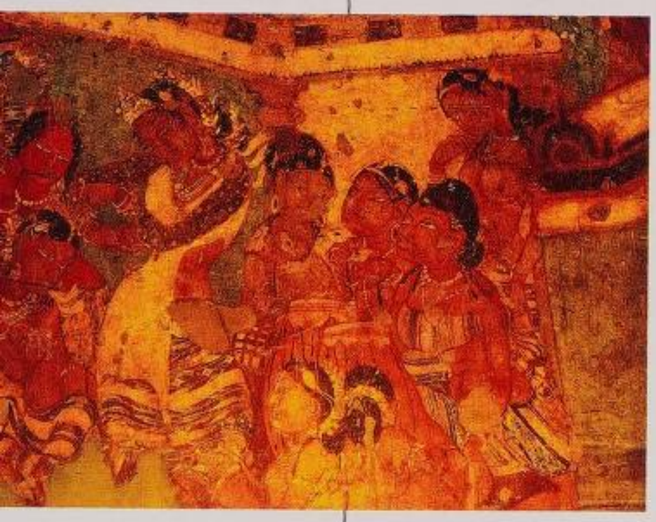
118 - Cave 1 at Ajanta is adorned with paintings depicting the episodes from the *Mahajanaka Jataka*, in which the Buddha took the form of Prince Mahajanaka, and his wife Sivali tried to convince him not to renounce worldly pleasures.

118-119 - Cave 2 at Ajanta is a *vihara*, a monastery, in which the monks' cells and the shrine of the Buddha face onto a large hall with 12 columns.

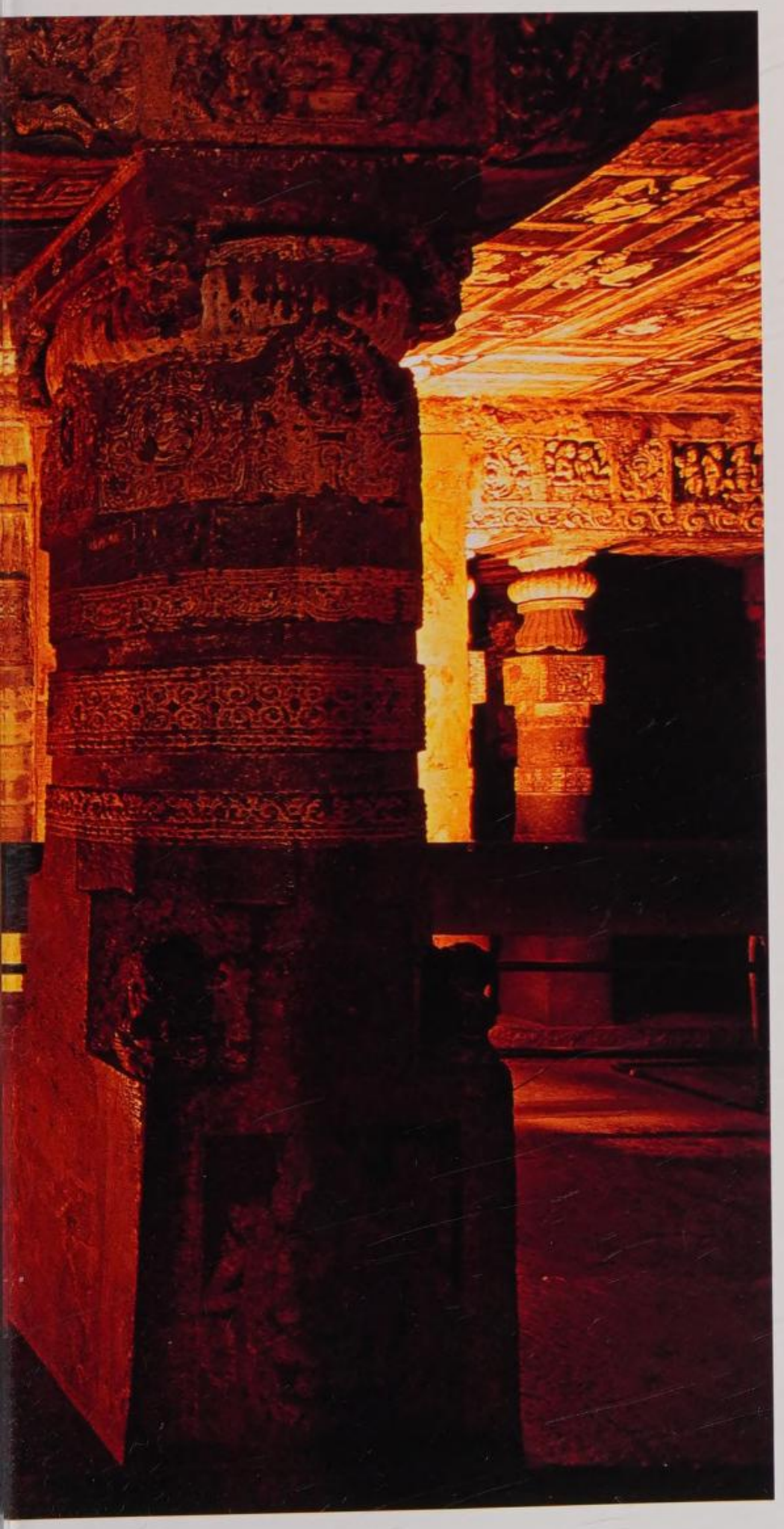
119 top - Cave 1 at Ajanta is a large *vihara* and houses a huge image of Padmapani, the most important bodhisattva.

119 center - This depiction of a *makara* is part of the decorative scheme of the ceiling in Cave 2 at Ajanta, which has the same architectural structure as Cave 1, divided into porch, hypostyle hall with 14 cells, vestibule and a shrine.

119 bottom - Cave 2 at Ajanta (5th-6th century AD) is famous for its splendid painted ceilings.

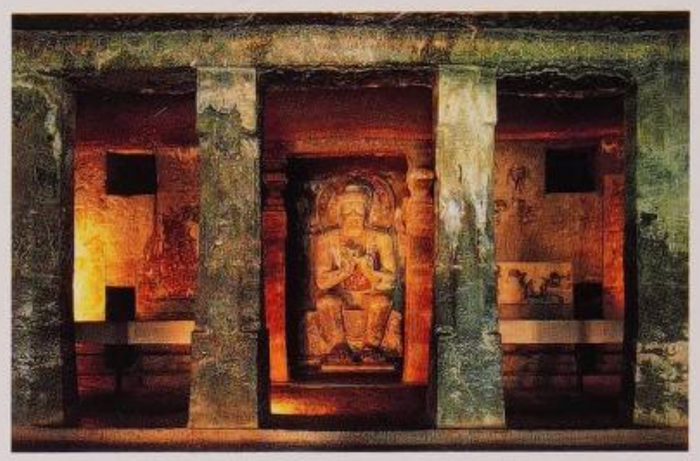


While the sole examples of Gupta pictorial art are represented by fragments of wall paintings in the Bagh Caves, that of the Vakataka artists is extensively documented by the paintings of the Ajanta Caves. These are undoubtedly one of the most famous sites in India, composed of 30 caves, not all completed, which were cut out of the rock between the 2nd century BC and the 5th century AD. The second period of Ajanta's artistic production is contemporary with the Vakataka dynasty. The rooms are carved out of a rocky amphitheater that rises 250 ft (76 m) above the dry bed of the Waghora River and constitutes a highly evocative sight. The many uncompleted caves allow us to deduce exactly how they were created. They were cut from top to bottom, progressively removing the waste material, so that the first part to be completed was the ceiling. The blocks destined to become columns were not removed and were skillfully carved with rich decorative motifs.



The most renowned examples of rock murals are contained in Caves 1, 2, 16 and 17. Cave 1 not only houses the finest paintings, with scenes from the life of the Buddha, but also a highly refined image of Bodhisattva Padmapani depicted holding a lotus flower. Cave 2, on the other hand, contains the famous painting of Queen Maya's dream and its interpretation, the descent from heaven, the birth of the Buddha, his first seven steps, and several episodes from the *Jatakas*. Indeed, the favorite themes of the Ajanta artists were generally inspired by the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha and episodes from the life of the historical Buddha.

Tempera is the medium used for these murals, in shades of red ocher, yellow ocher, lampblack, lapis-lazuli blue and white. The Ajanta painters were extremely skilled at applying the six main canons of Indian painting, namely variety of forms (*rupabhedra*), proportion of the figures (*pramana*), expression of emotion and sentiment (*bhava*), embodiment of charm (*lavanya*), true correspondence (*sadrsya*) and, finally, the application of a pleasantly variegated natural palette (*varnikabhanga*).



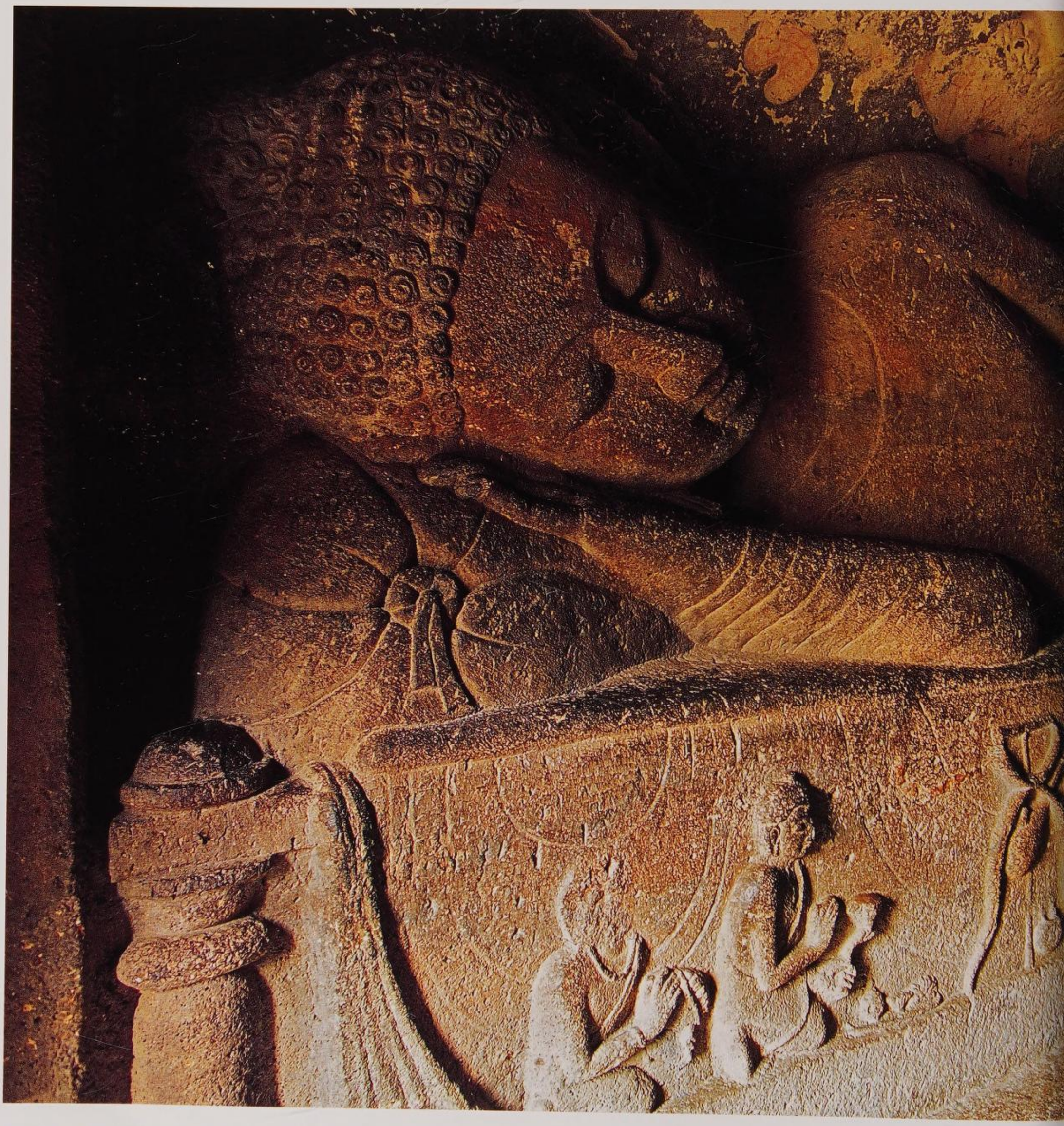
Cave 16 tells the story of Nanda, the Buddha's cousin, who abandoned his beautiful wife to follow his ascetic vocation.

The images that crowd the walls of Cave 17 are absolutely enchanting: the imposing fleet of ships illustrated in great detail, reveals the nautical expertise of the Vakatakas, while the depiction of the king and the queen in the harem or garden constitutes important evidence of the great range of themes that inspired the Ajanta painters. The *dampati* (loving couples) motif is also featured in Cave 17, where it is repeated to form a long row above the entrance. The ceilings of Caves 1 and 17 are decorated with long friezes of swans and birds, heavenly beings, shells, lotus flowers, and many other phytomorphic motifs.

120 TOP - *VIHARA* 16 IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MONASTERIES OF THE AJANTA COMPLEX AND COMBINES POWER AND ELEGANCE.

120 BOTTOM - THIS PAINTING IN CAVE 17 AT AJANTA SHOWS A PRINCELY COUPLE SEATED ON A SORT OF VERANDA WITH PILLARS. THE MAN IS DEPICTED OFFERING HIS BRIDE A CUP OF WINE.

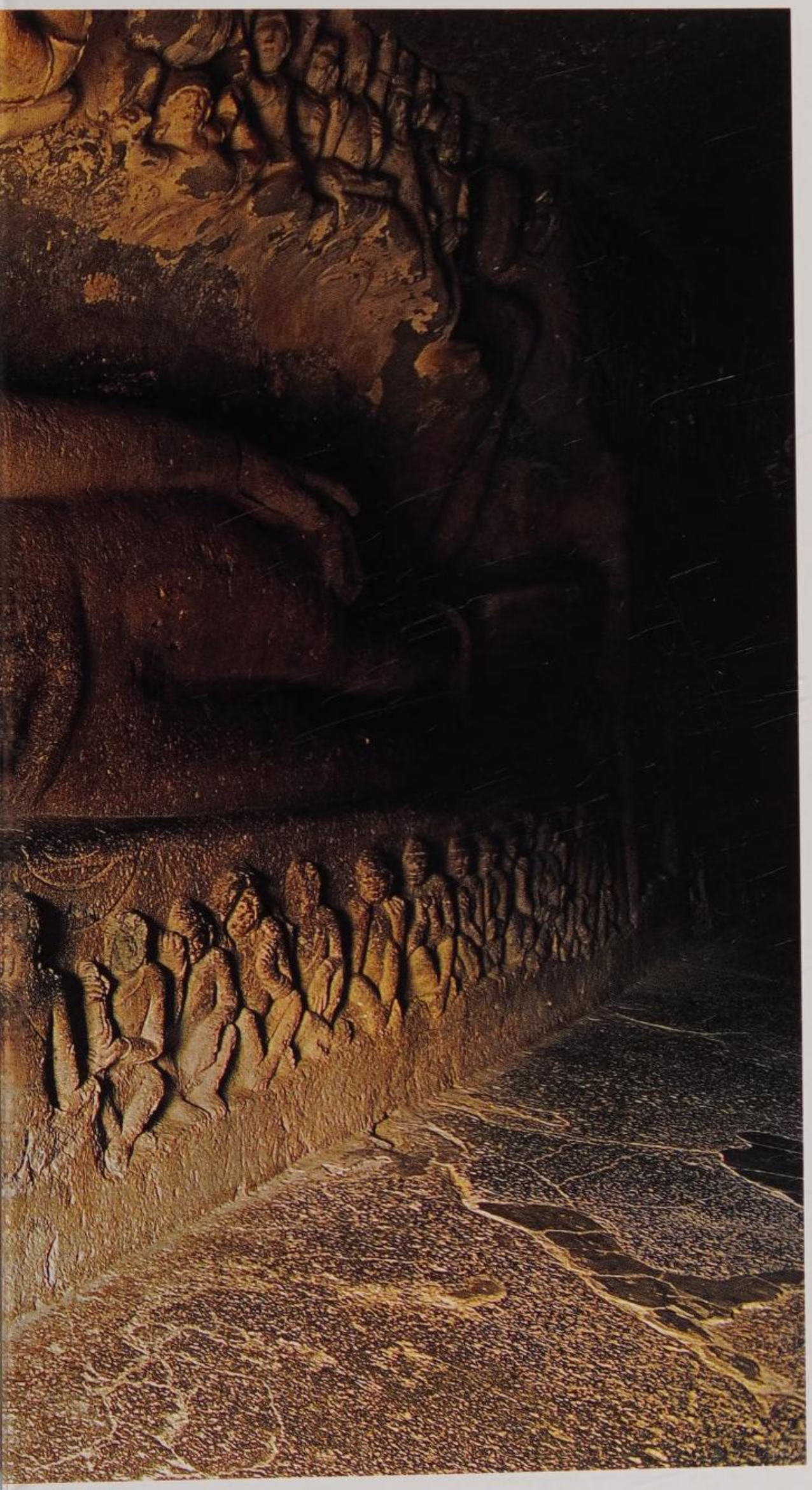
121 - THIS SCULPTURE OF THE SEATED BUDDHA ENGAGED IN TEACHING AND ACCOMPANIED BY THE BODHISATTVAS PADMAPANI AND VAJRAPANI IS HOUSED IN THE SHRINE OF CAVE 17 AT AJANTA.



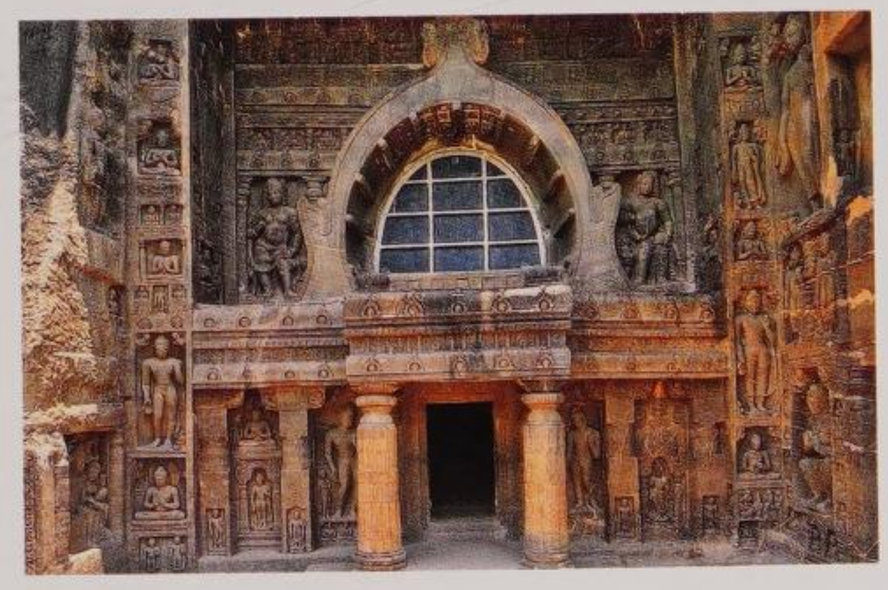
122-123 - Cave 26 at Ajanta (5th-6th century AD) houses a relief depicting the Parinirvana (total extinction) of the Buddha, coinciding with his physical death.

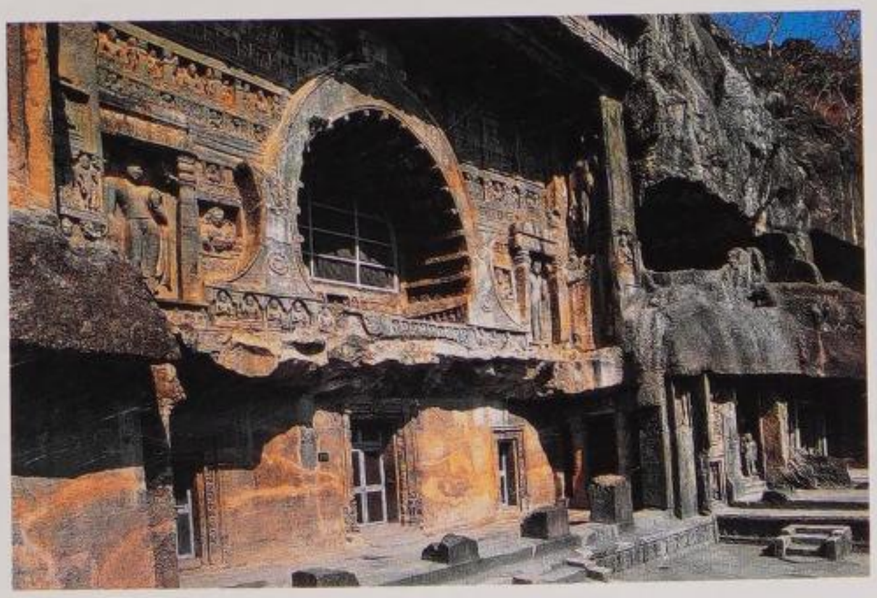
This splendid example of Vakataka art illustrates the grief of the disciples and deities present at the physical death of the Enlightened One.

123 top - The stupa in Cave 26 at Ajanta houses a Buddha seated on an elaborate throne supported by two pairs of elephants and lions.



However, the Ajanta artists did not only produce masterpieces of painting, but also splendid sculpture. *Chaityagriha* 26 is one of the most extraordinary monuments of Buddhist art and is famous for the majestic Buddha reclining on his right side during his Parinirvana, his total extinction coinciding with his physical death. The base depicts his grieving disciples, while the deities appear above the Buddha's recumbent body. Caves 16 and 17 are *viharas*, each consisting of a pillared main room surrounded by monks' cells. The columns of the Vakataka caves are extremely elaborate in both their form and their decorative motifs. The votive stupas ('mounds') housed in these apsidal halls feature a relief of a Buddha seated in the "European" style (*pralambapada asana*), the characteristic position of the period adopted by both Vakataka and Gupta artists. The façade of Cave 19, completely covered with architectural reliefs, has the usual horseshoe motif above the entrance that forms a great window in the center.

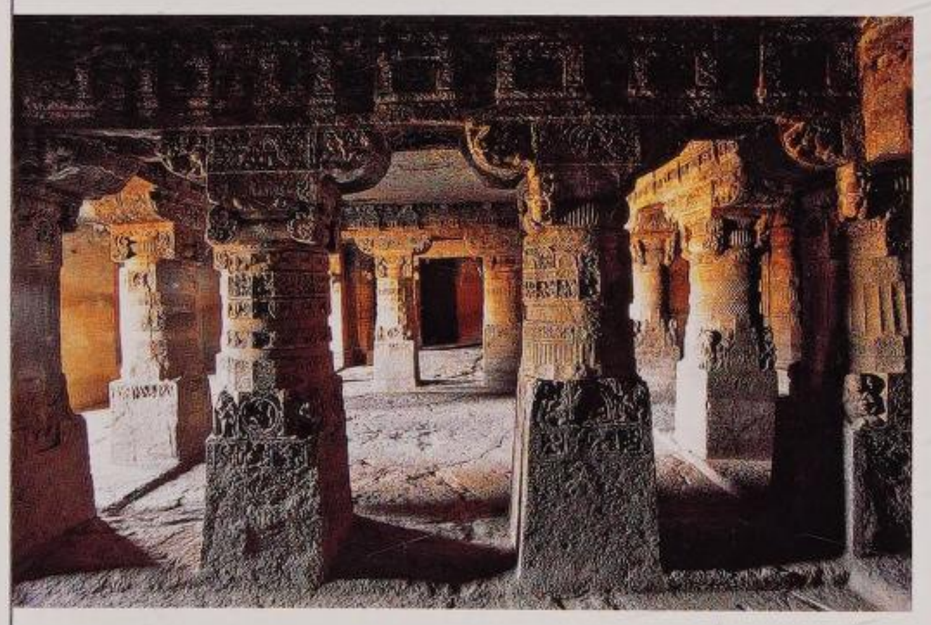


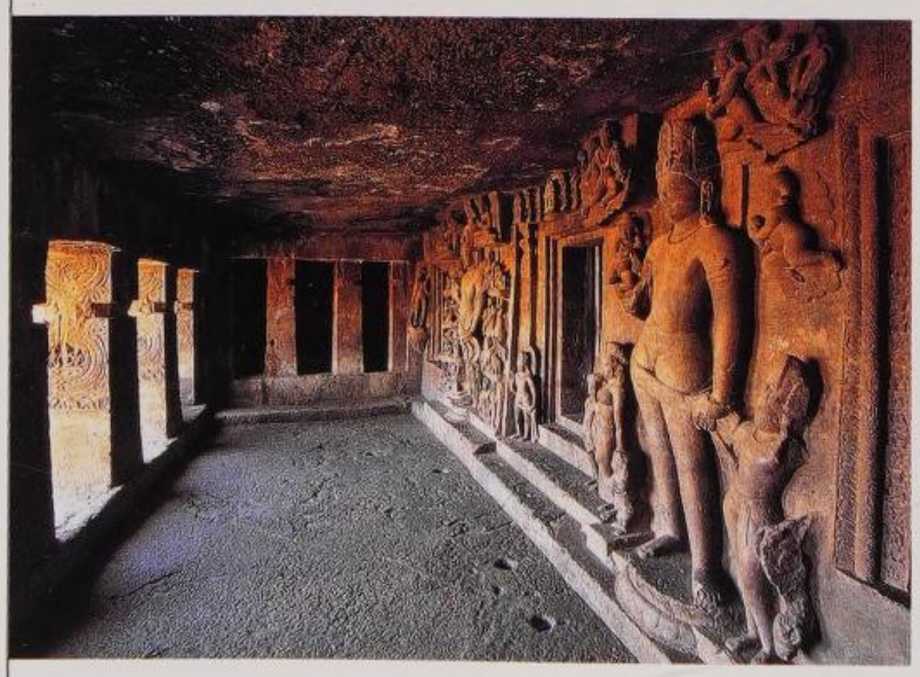


123 CENTER - THE FAÇADE OF CAVE 19 AT AJANTA IS EMBELLISHED WITH AN ELEGANT PORCH AND A LARGE CHAITYA WINDOW, SURROUNDED BY MANY FIGURES OF THE BUDDHA.

123 BOTTOM - THE FAÇADE OF CAVE 26 AT AJANTA HAS A LARGE RIBBED, HORSESHOE-SHAPED WINDOW WITH CRESCENT BUTTRESSES.

The tastes of the Vakataka dynasty were not only expressed at Ajanta and Elephanta Island, but also in the construction of the older Ellora and Aurangabad Caves. The latter all belong to the Vakataka period, apart from Cave 4 that dates from the time of the Satavahana dynasty (2nd century AD). The complex is composed of 10 or so caves, the most notable of which is Cave 7. This cave has a porch and a veranda with two shrines at the ends that open onto the central hall, where the sanctuary is guarded by a pair of beautiful figures of Tara, the goddess who helps men to cross the ocean of existence. It too houses a Buddha seated in the "European style" and a famous dancer and musicians group, considered one of the greatest achievements of Indian sculpture, carved on one wall.





124 top - This panel depicting Avalokiteshvara with worshippers is situated on one side of the porch of Cave 7 at Aurangabad.

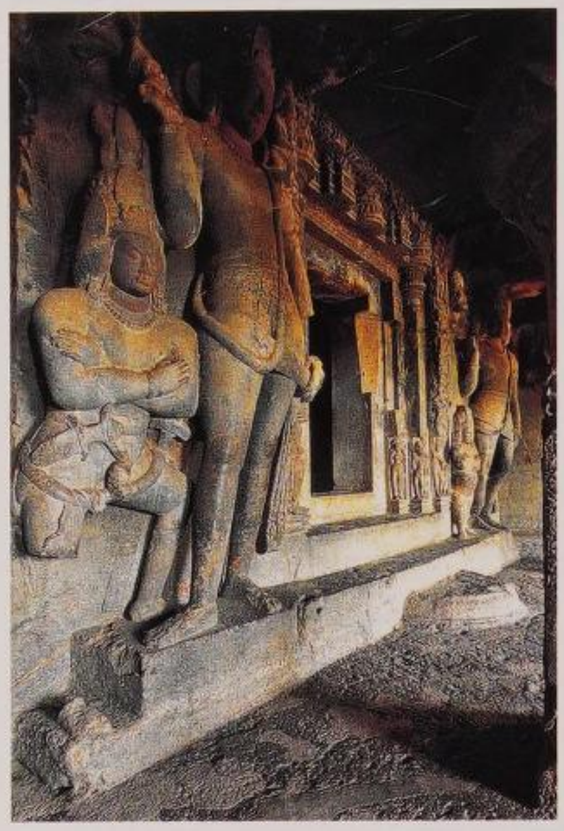
124 center - Cave 3 at Aurangabad is a *vihara*, whose inner hall has 12 columns with square bases and polygonal shafts adorned with plant motifs.

124 bottom - The porch of Cave 7 at Aurangabad has three panels depicting Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, the latter with attendants and dwarfs.

124-125 - The shrine of Cave 7 at Aurangabad houses a huge figure of the Buddha seated on a lion-shaped throne as he turns the Wheel of the Law.

126 TOP - CAVE 21 HOUSES TWO OF THE FINEST RELIEFS OF THE ELLORA COMPLEX: SHIVA PLAYING DICE WITH PARVATI, AND SHIVA DANCING IN THE *KATISAMA* POSE.

126 BOTTOM LEFT - THE FAÇADE OF CAVE 21 (THE RAMESHVARA CAVE) AT ELLORA CONSISTS OF A PLATFORM EDGED BY A PARAPET WITH A FRIEZE OF ELEPHANTS AND DECORATED COLUMNS.



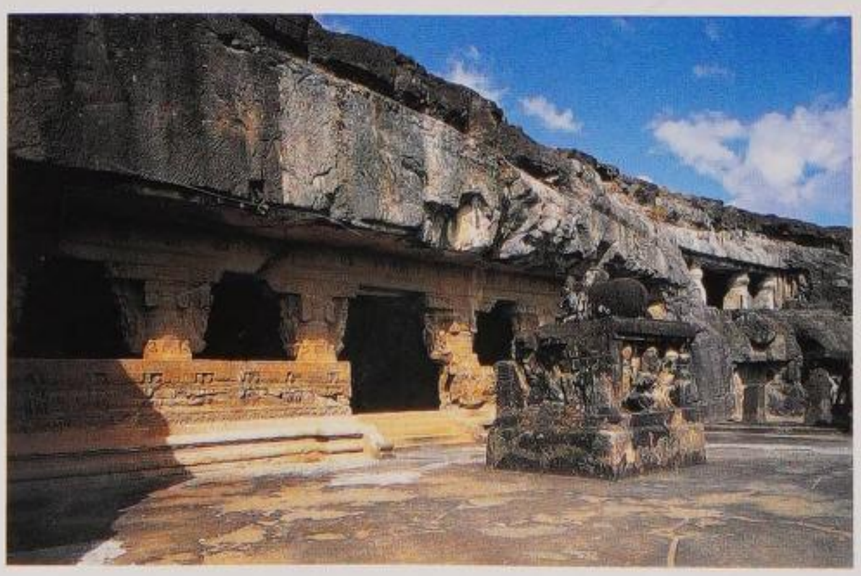
126 BOTTOM RIGHT - THE GREAT CENTRAL SHRINE OF CAVE 29 AT ELLORA HAS A LARGE AMBULATORY AND IS OVERLOOKED BY HUGE STATUES OF GUARDIANS SITUATED ON THE FOUR SIDES.

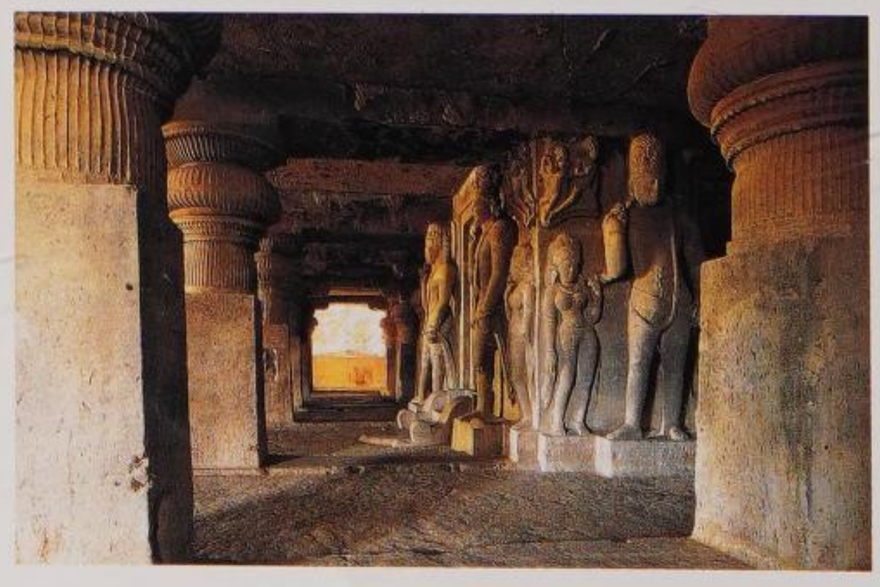
126-127 - THIS RELIEF IN CAVE 29 AT ELLORA DEPICTS SHIVA AND HIS DIVINE CONSORT PARVATI.

The extraordinary site of Ellora is composed of 34 monuments carved out of the side of a rocky hill, in which all three of the great religions of the time – Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism – are represented. Ellora is home to one of the most majestic and extraordinary monuments in Indian history: the monolithic Kailasanatha temple, which is considered the finest example of cave architecture in the world. Much of it was built during the rule of Krishna I, a king of the Rashtrakutra dynasty who is believed to have ruled from AD 757 to 773, and who will consequently be discussed in the next chapter. Around the Kailasanatha temple are a series of cave temples built between the 5th and the 11th centuries.

The Brahman cave of Rameshvara (Cave 21) dates from the period of the Vakatakas and has a splendid veranda with a pair of monumental figures of the goddesses Ganga and Yamuna at its ends. Other Hindu temples include those of Dashavatura, Ravana ka Khai and Dhu Marlena. The Dashavatara cave has two stories, each formed by a large pillared hall, whose end wall is full of niches that frame panels depicting Vaisnavite or Shaivite subjects, while the Dhu Marlena cave houses a sanctuary open on all four sides, guarded by the usual *dvarapala* figures by the doors. Chandragupta II was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta (AD 415-455), during whose reign the boundaries of the empire remained stable. This was an extremely peaceful period, marked by great religious tolerance, which witnessed the strengthening of the administrative structures of the Gupta state. The next ruler, Skandagupta, the illegitimate son and general of Kumaragupta, had to deal with the uprising of a vassal tribal population, the Pushyamitras, and subsequently also the first incursions of the Hephthalites, or White Huns. It appears that Skandagupta first clashed with the Huns around AD 460 and he asserted his victory over both them and the Pushyamitras in an inscription. His death was followed by a long struggle for the succession, which finally ended with the ascent to the throne of Budhagupta, whose rule lasted for 40 years.

During this period the boundaries of the empire remained basically unaltered, but following the king's death the decline of the dynasty was very rapid. After having conquered part of northwestern India, the Huns, led by Toramana, defeated the troops of the last Gupta ruler – the obscure Bhanugupta – at Eran in AD 510.





THE HINDU DEITIES

The Hindu pantheon, whose canonic iconography was established during the Gupta era, is extremely rich and varied. The number of divine figures varies greatly depending on which source is consulted: the Veda mentions 33, divided into 3 groups of 11 referring to the triple world of sky, atmosphere and earth; however the *Puranas* talk of thousands of divine figures and the *Agni Purana* specifies that there are 33 thousand, 33 hundred and 33. Leaving aside the matter of quantification, the multiplicity of forms in which the divine manifests itself is a function of the infinite nature of Brahman, the impersonal Absolute, and the number of Hindu deities is equal to that of the likenesses of the manifold, which are derived by emanation from Brahman. Hindu divinities perform the same function as Christian saints and do not invalidate in any way the unity of the divine, but merely explain its all-inclusive nature.

The principal divine figures are organized in a triad (Trimurti), composed of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Each of these is responsible for one of the functions of the divine: Brahma oversees the creation during which the universe is manifested; Vishnu embodies the principle of the conservation of the universe; while Shiva represents that of the destruction that governs each periodical end of the world and its consequent reabsorption in the Brahman. While Vishnu and Shiva have, over the years, become the subjects of both popular devotion and the attention of artists, just one important temple in the whole of India is dedicated to the god Brahma, at Pushkar, in Rajasthan.

Brahma's nature is fundamentally mortal. Indeed, despite leading very long lives of the duration of 100 years in which each day lasts 4.32 billion human years, he is destined to be born and die periodically. He came forth from a lotus that issued from Vishnu Narayana's navel as he slept in the coils of the serpent Shesha that floats above the cosmic waters and, immediately after birth, started to sing the Veda as the truth that governs the world. Brahma is depicted as red, with four faces, usually bearded, which symbolize the four Vedas (or the four *varnas*, or the four cosmic eras, or the four directions of space) and four arms, usually with a sacrificial spoon, a book, a rosary and a small water-pot in his hands. Brahma is worshipped as the ancestor of the gods and men, and his wife is Sarasvati, the goddess of eloquence, wisdom and knowledge, the patroness of sculpture and music, and the mother of poetry.

Sarasvati is usually depicted seated on a lotus, with a crescent moon on her forehead and a pale complexion. She has two or more arms and holds a *vina*, a book and a *mala* (rosary). She rides a wild goose, which symbolizes knowledge. The vehicle (the animal mount that accompanies the leading Hindu deities) completes and reinforces the depiction of the nature of the divine being.

128 - This marble relief dating from the 11th century AD depicts the goddess Sarasvati, the guardian deity of writers and poets, goddess of knowledge and protectress of the arts. She is also the wife of the god Brahma and the inventor of the Sanskrit alphabet (British Museum, London).

129 - The god Brahma, depicted here in a sculpture dating from the 11th or 12th century, is the first of the triad of gods (Trimurti) that also comprises Vishnu and Shiva, and is the personification of the Absolute in his role as active creator of the universe (Museum of Indian Art, Berlin).

The god Shiva is one of the oldest deities, whose iconography can be traced back as far as the Indus Valley civilization and the famous steatite seal depicting the so-called proto-Shiva. The term "Shiva," which means "auspicious, beneficial, propitious, salutary," was used during the Vedic period to refer to Rudra, the terrifying god of storms. Later, around the 2nd century BC, the epithet became independent, acquiring its own identity, and was used to denote the most harmoniously ambiguous deity of the Brahmanic pantheon. Opposite tendencies converge in Shiva's composite nature: he is at once the divine yogin, the great ascetic capable of inflicting the most terrible mortifications, and the symbol of procreation. Shiva combines ascesis and eroticism in a superior harmony.

In aniconic ("symbolic") form, Shiva is the *linga*, a phallic-shaped cylinder housed in the innermost sanctuary of all the temples dedicated to the god. It is an exceptionally sacred object that is holier than any anthropomorphic image. A distinction is made between mobile and fixed *lingas*, according to the material from which they are made, and they are divided up into six types: stone, precious stones, metal, wood, clay, and non-durable materials, such as sand, butter, cow dung, etc. The *linga* usually rests on a four-sided base called the *brahma-bhaga* (portion of Brahma), on top of which is an octagonal structure known as the *vishnu-bhaga* (portion of Vishnu), topped in turn by a pedestal supporting the actual *linga*. This base reproduces the form of the *yoni*, the female sexual organ, and indicates the coexistence and inseparability of the male and female principles, of Shiva and his Shakti, the divine power identified with the Great Goddess. *Mukha-lingas*, bearing one or more carved faces of Shiva, represent a particular type of *linga*. An example is the *Sadashiva* of the Elephanta Caves.

Shiva's eclectic nature is expressed in the wide variety of his depictions: in *Shiva Purana* he is indicated with 1008 names that describe the same number of aspects of his being. In his most terrifying form he is Bhairava, "the Frightful One", and when accompanied by a retinue of drunken ghosts, with which he frequents cemeteries and places of cremation, he is Bhuteshvara. However, he is also Maheshvara, the "Great Lord"; Shankara, the "Bestower of Happiness"; Mahakala, the "Great Time," undivided time in its entirety; Pashupati, "Lord of the Beasts," i.e., of individual souls; Mahayogi, the "Great Yogi"; Nataraja, the "Lord of the Dance"; Dakshinamurti, the "Supreme Teacher"; Bhikshatana, the "Enchanting Mendicant"; Ardhanarishvara, the "Lord who is Half-Woman;" and Harihara, the "Vishnu-Shiva."

130 - This four-sided *linga* dates from the 9th century AD. The *linga* is a phallic symbol that represents the aniconic form of the god Shiva, whose anthropomorphic form it replaces in the innermost sanctuary of Shaivite temples (British Museum, London).

131 left - Shiva is probably the oldest deity of the Vedic pantheon. His nature is complex, changeable and often contradictory, striving between his benign and desirable form and his terrible and frightening one (Musée Guimet, Paris).

131 right - This sculpture depicts Lakulisha. Considered by some of the *Puranas* as the 28th and last incarnation of the god Shiva, he was the founder of the Pashupata sect, one of the extreme developments of the cult of Shiva (British Museum, London).

The many forms in which this god is depicted satisfy the variety of his multifaceted personality and the extensive mythology that describes his nature. Shiva Mahayogi is shown dressed in a tiger skin, with a snake draped around his neck and a trident in his hand. His wrists, forearms and chest are adorned with rosaries, his long tresses are gathered on top of his head, from where they spill over his shoulders, and are crowned with a crescent moon. On his forehead is painted the third eye, directed at the transcendent perception, with one glance of which he burnt to ashes Kama, the god of love, who tried to turn the Great Yogi's attention toward more romantic matters in response to a plea for help from the infatuated Parvati. The goddess Ganga, the divine manifestation of the river whose power was broken by the god's hair, is depicted gushing from Shiva's head.

Depictions of Shiva are often accompanied by the *damaru*, a small hourglass-shaped drum, whose shape and sound emanate the rhythms of the cosmos. The *damaru* both accompanies and constitutes an integral part of the iconography of Shiva Nataraja, whose dance expresses the elegance and fury of the cosmogonical act and the god's imperturbability as he destroys the world. The details of the representation of Shiva Nataraja can be read like a complex pictographic allegory. His upper right hand holds the *damaru* that symbolizes sound, the vehicle of the word that conveys the revelation, tradition, incantation, prayer and divine truth. Sound is associated with the air, the first of the five elements, and both represent the initial moment of the creation. His opposite (upper left) hand is slightly cupped and a tongue of fire, an element associated with destruction, rests on his palm. The symmetrical pose of his hands illustrates how creation and destruction counterpoise each other in the cosmic dance. The Transcendent is depicted in Shiva as an inexorable clash of opposites: incessant production versus the insatiable thirst for extermination, and sound versus flame. The second right hand is making the "fear-not" gesture (*abhaya-mudra*) that dispenses peace and protection, while the other left hand, suspended at chest height, points downward to his raised left foot. This foot symbolizes release and is the refuge and salvation of the devout. The hand that indicates it is held in the elephant-trunk pose (*gajahasta*), recalling the god Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Shiva is depicted dancing on the prostrated body of a dwarf: this is Apasmara Purusha, the Demon of Forgetfulness, who symbolizes the blindness of life and man's ignorance. Victory over this demon consists in reaching true wisdom, in which one is free from worldly bonds. A circle of flames and light emanates from the god and surrounds him. It is believed that it represents both the processes of the universe and its creatures and the energy of Wisdom, the transcendent light of the knowledge of truth. Shiva's braids are long and disheveled, partly loose and partly arranged to form a sort of pyramid, in which an extraordinary vital energy resides. The god's vehicle is the bull Nandi, which stands at the entrance to most Shivaite temples. It symbolizes strength and fertility, reinforcing the god's procreative aspect. The mythology and iconography of this versatile and fascinating god is completed by his consort and sons, who include the highly popular god Ganesha, also known as Ganapati.

132 - This relief depicts Skanda, god of war and son of Shiva and Parvati. Skanda appears as a youth with two or twelve arms and one or six faces. His vehicle is a peacock and his emblem is a cock (British Museum, London).

133 - This 13th-century stone sculpture depicts the god Ganesha, who is the personification of those qualities that enable all kinds of obstacles to be overcome. He is the incarnation of material success and the good life, prosperity and the peace that derives from it (British Museum, London).

Strictly speaking, Ganesha is the son of Parvati, rather than Shiva, for the myth describes that he was born from her sweat, or from the unguents that she used to perfume her body. It also tells how Parvati put Ganesha to guard her rooms, in order to protect her privacy and tranquility, particularly from her impulsive husband. When Shiva arrived, Ganesha prevented him from entering, arousing the anger of the hotheaded god, who had the boy decapitated. However, Parvati's anger and grief persuaded Shiva to ask the gods to travel north and to bring back the head of the first creature that they encountered. This was an elephant and the myth is recalled in depictions of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god. Ganesha's vehicle (*vahana*) is a rat and both symbolize the removal of obstacles: the god with his power and might, and the rat with its nimbleness. Ganesha represents those qualities that allow all difficulties to be surmounted. The first of these are intelligence and wisdom, and for this reason he is invoked at the beginning of every venture, from a journey to a work of literature. Ganesha is often associated with the color red and has four arms, a broken tusk and huge, fan-shaped ears. His trunk is curved, symbolizing the possibility of getting round obstacles. He has four arms, in whose hands he holds a tray full of sweetmeats, an elephant goad or an ax, and a lotus, while his fourth hand is depicted making the "fear-not" (*abhaya*) gesture. He is shown with a potbelly, symbolizing wealth and abundance, for it contains the entire manifestation of that which is.

While Ganesha is Shiva's son only in as far as the desire for maternity was born in Parvati in her role as his wife, the couple's other son was created by Shiva alone, for Parvati did not contribute to his birth in any way. Indeed, it is told that while Shiva and Parvati were united in a sexual embrace, they were interrupted by the gods and the seed of Shiva was caught in the mouth of Agni, for whom however the fierce heat that it released was unbearable, causing him to spit it into the Ganges River. Here an embryo formed that was subsequently deposited on a mountain where the six Pleiades fed and raised it. This god, born of the seed of Shiva, was named Skanda or Karttikeya and became the god of war, whose mount is a peacock.

Shiva's family group is completed by his two subsequent consorts, who are projections of the Great Goddess. Shiva initially married Sati, the daughter of the patriarch Daksha. However, Sati's great love for Shiva was equaled by Daksha's hatred for him and when Daksha prepared to celebrate a great sacrifice without inviting Shiva, his daughter threw herself into the flames. Shiva, deeply aggrieved for the death of Sati, withdrew to Mount Kailasa, his heavenly abode, with the intention of practicing the most severe ascetic discipline. In due course, the Great Goddess was reborn as Parvati, the daughter of Mena and Himavat, the personification of the Himalayas. With the help of Kama and by practicing the most rigorous and severe austerities, she managed to divert Shiva from his ascetic existence and induced him to marry her, against the will of her parents, who considered the god a solitary wanderer surrounded by specters and monsters.

134 - This sandstone stele depicts the first incarnation of Vishnu: Matsya, the fish, who saved the first man, Manu, from the all-consuming flood (British Museum, London).

135 - This statue depicts the divine couple Shiva and Parvati above the resting figure of Nandi the bull, Shiva's *vahana* (Archaeological Museum, Sarnath).

Vishnu, the "Pervader," on the other hand, is the keeper of the dharma, protecting, supporting and preserving the universe and all beings. He was originally a secondary Vedic deity, personifying the energy of the sun, but was later given new attributes and numerous legends not included in the Rig Veda. He subsequently became one of the supreme deities and assumed the traits of a god endowed with infinite benevolence toward his followers and mankind in general. He is generally depicted with four arms in whose hands appear his main attributes: the *chakra* (discus), which symbolizes both the sun and his mind capable of destroying ignorance; the *gada* (mace), the power of the intellect; the *padma* (lotus), the image of the universe; and the *shanka* (conch), which represents the origins of creation. He is blue-skinned and wears a crown and a yellow garment. On his chest he has a curl of hair that represents Nature as the basis of the physical and mental universe and in his aniconic (symbolic) form he is represented by the Seagram, a smooth, black oval fossil ammonite, generally from the riverbed of the Ganges.

Vishnu's popularity increased further with the ideation of his avatars, his earthly incarnations, which periodically come to man's aid during times of great danger and turmoil of the cosmic order. Vishnu has ten avatars, nine of which have already fulfilled their task and the tenth is awaited for the end of the current ill-omened Kali *yuga* of in the existence of humankind. The sequence of Vishnu's avatars illustrates the progressive evolution from the representation of animal forms to the depiction of anthropomorphic ones. Indeed, the first three incarnations are those of Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise) and Varaha (boar), while the fourth represents a transition phase, Narasimha (half man, half lion), and the fifth introduces a true human representation, with Vamana (dwarf). The following avatars are Parashurama (Rama with the ax), Rama (hero of the *Ramayana* epic), Krishna, Buddha (who was skillfully integrated in the elastic fabric of Brahmanic ideology) and finally Kalkin.

136 - Vishnu has blue skin and wears a crown studded with precious stones. His attributes are the discus, the mace, the lotus and the conch (Musée Guimet, Paris).

137 - The central bronze of this trio represents the god Vishnu, he who protects, supports and preserves the universe, defeating the forces and instincts that lead to disorder (British Museum, London).

138 - This bronze sculpture depicts the goddess Kali, who is simultaneously benevolent and terrifying (Musée Guimet, Paris).

139 left - Vishnu's seventh avatar is Rama, or Ramachandra, King of Ayodhya (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia).

139 right - Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, assumes numerous forms and his iconography is equally varied (Archaeological Museum, Halebidu).

Of these, the figures of Rama and Krishna are doubtlessly the most popular and best loved by devout Hindus. They condense completely different qualities and characteristics. While Rama embodies the idea of the ideal king, Krishna's principal appeal lies in his playful and sensual nature. Rama's earthly fortunes are told in the *Ramayana*, one of the greatest epics of the Hindu tradition, while the rich and extensive mythology of Krishna describes both the god's childhood and youth and his revelation as the supreme Lord of the universe in the *Mahabharata*, the other great Indian epic. Vishnu's wife is the goddess Lakshmi, also known as Shri and the personification of wealth and good fortune.

Born out of the churning of the milky ocean by the gods and demons, she is depicted seated on a lotus holding a cornucopia, or with two lotus blossoms and two white elephants holding a water-pot in their trunks.

She is adorned with many jewels that reinforce her status of goddess of wealth. Lakshmi accompanies Vishnu in his earthly incarnations, taking the form of the consort of his avatars: she is Sita, Rama's wife, and Radha, Krishna's favorite *gopi* (cowherd).

In addition to the numerous female forms used to represent the divine, the Great Goddess is the wife of Shiva, known not only as Parvati and Sati, but also as Uma, Amba, Lalita and Gauri when referring to her benevolent nature, or Durga, Candi, Camunda, Bhairavi and Kali in her terrifying forms.

The goddess Kali is depicted as a woman with four arms, whose hands hold a noose, a shinbone topped with a skull, a sword and a severed head, as she dances on the inert body of Shiva. She is black-faced with fangs and a long tongue protruding from her mouth that gushes blood. Her neck is adorned with a garland of skulls.

In the Hindu chronology time is organized cyclically in four cosmic ages known as *yugas*, which describe a progressive decline in the dharma (moral order) of the world. The names of these four *yugas* are named after the throws of an Indian game of dice. While the first, Krita *yuga*, corresponds to a sort of golden age, characterized by morality, justice, truth and order, the subsequent Treta, Dvapara and Kali *yugas* represent the subsequent stages of the inexorable corruption of the dharma. The age in which we live is the fourth, the Krita *yuga*, which is the quintessence of all evils, in which disorder, impiety and injustice reign supreme. The length of each *yuga* decreases with the parallel loss of dharma and corresponds (from first to last) to 4000, 3000, 2000 and 1000 divine years. Between each of these ages are 2 twilight zones, lasting 400, 300, 200 and 100 divine years respectively. As each divine year lasts 360 human years, the four *yugas* occupy a period of 4,320,000 human years. The current Kali *yuga* began on February 18, 3102 BC, the date of the death of Krishna, and will last 432,000 human years. Consequently, we are still at the beginning of this dark age.

Time is not only cyclical, but also relative because the days and years have different lengths according to whether they refer to the human world or the divine world. Consequently, while the four cosmic ages with their relative twilight zones constitute a *mahayuga* ("great *yuga*"), 1000 *mahayugas* make a *kalpa*, i.e., an age of the world, equal to one day in the life of Brahma. Each day of Brahma ends with the reabsorption of the universe into the undifferentiated One, which is followed by a night of Brahma that heralds the renewal of the manifestation at the dawn of the following day. An entire life of Brahma lasts 100 years of 360 days and is known as a *mahakalpa*, at the end of which Brahma dies and the universe is completely annihilated (*mahapralaya*). The subsequent stage in the cycle commences with Vishnu sleeping in the coils of the serpent Shesha, awaiting the reawakening of the energy. This energy takes the form of the Great Goddess, who recommences the process of the manifestation of the universe. The stem of a lotus issues from the navel of the sleeping Vishnu, from which Brahma is reborn. However, while Brahma is subject to periodic birth and death, this is not the case for the supreme Lord, Vishnu or Shiva, who has always existed and will always exist: an entire lifetime of Brahma is over in the batting of his eye.

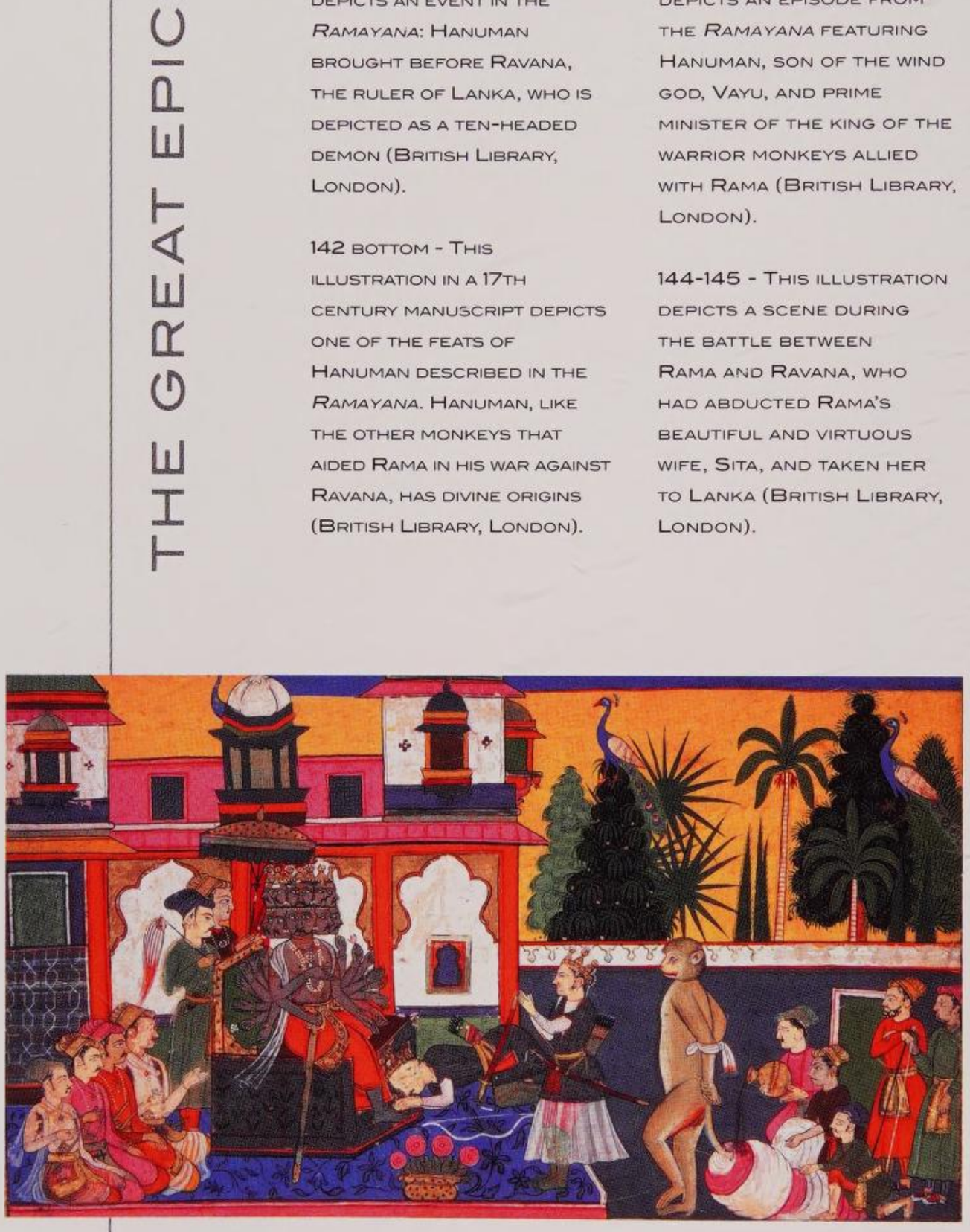
140-141 - This painting depicts the god Vishnu sleeping in the coils of the serpent Shesha at the end of a life of Brahma, following which the world is completely annihilated (Private collection).

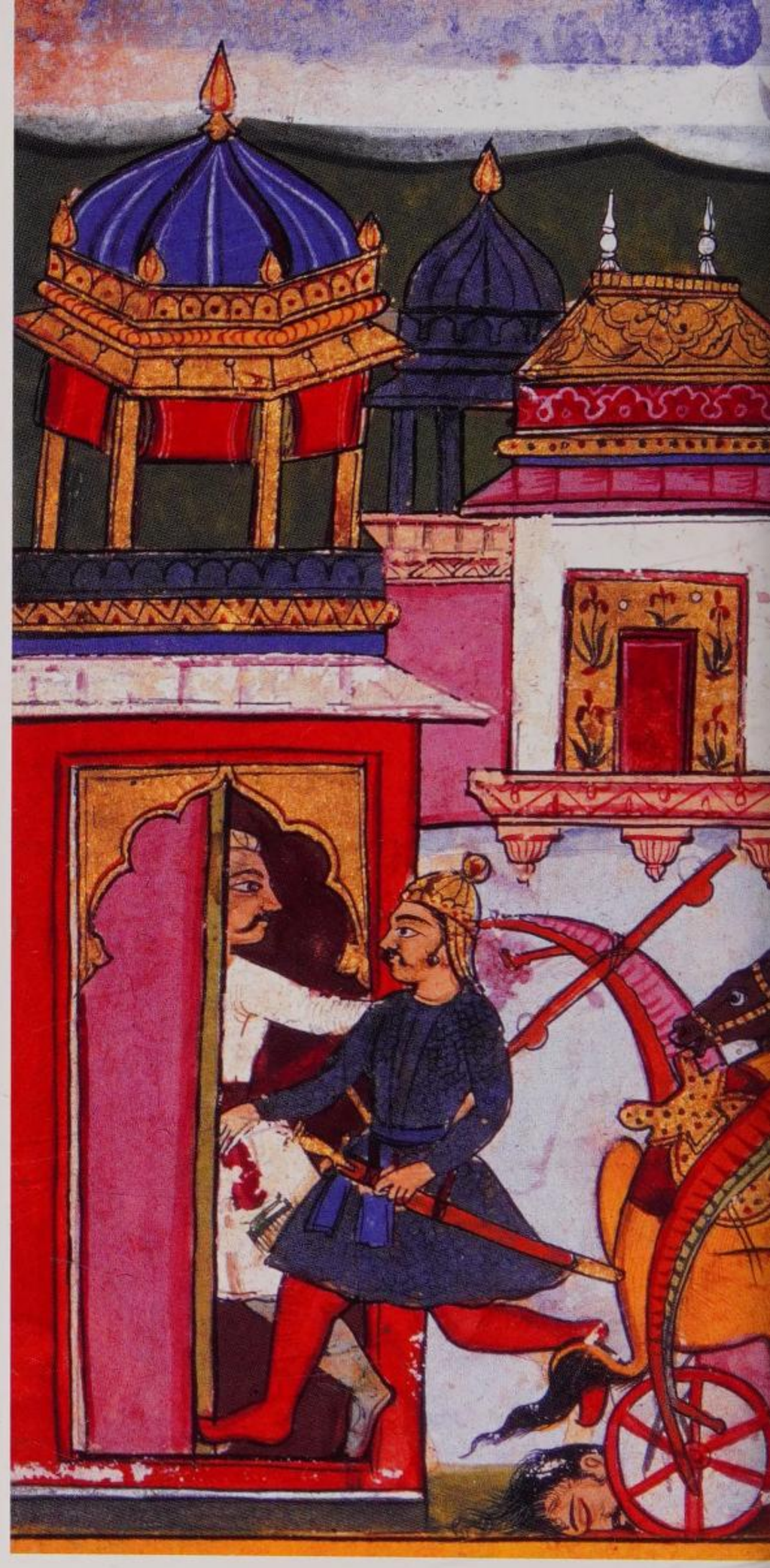
142 TOP - THIS ILLUSTRATION DEPICTS AN EVENT IN THE *RAMAYANA*: HANUMAN BROUGHT BEFORE RAVANA, THE RULER OF LANKA, WHO IS DEPICTED AS A TEN-HEADED DEMON (BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON).

142 BOTTOM - THIS ILLUSTRATION IN A 17TH CENTURY MANUSCRIPT DEPICTS ONE OF THE FEATS OF HANUMAN DESCRIBED IN THE *RAMAYANA*. HANUMAN, LIKE THE OTHER MONKEYS THAT AIDED RAMA IN HIS WAR AGAINST RAVANA, HAS DIVINE ORIGINS (BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON).

142-143 - THIS ILLUSTRATION DEPICTS AN EPISODE FROM THE *RAMAYANA* FEATURING HANUMAN, SON OF THE WIND GOD, VAYU, AND PRIME MINISTER OF THE KING OF THE WARRIOR MONKEYS ALLIED WITH RAMA (BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON).

144-145 - THIS ILLUSTRATION DEPICTS A SCENE DURING THE BATTLE BETWEEN RAMA AND RAVANA, WHO HAD ABDUCTED RAMA'S BEAUTIFUL AND VIRTUOUS WIFE, SITA, AND TAKEN HER TO LANKA (BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON).





The two great Hindu epics are the *Ramayana*, attributed to Valmiki and dating from the 2nd century AD, and the *Mahabharata*, written over an extended period between the 5th century BC and the 4th-5th century AD, and credited to the legendary sage Vyasa.

The *Ramayana* ("Romance of Rama") is divided up into 7 books consisting of a total of 24,000 couplets and tells the story of the earthly fortunes of Vishnu's seventh avatar, Rama, whose name means "He who Pleases" or "The One who Delights." He is the ruler of Ayodhya, the prototype of the perfect sovereign, whose kingdom (*Rama Rajya*) embodies the

ideals of truth and justice. The *Ramayana* tells the story of how Vishnu decided to be incarnated as Rama in order to slay the ten-headed demon Ravana, intent on oppressing the gods, who appealed to him for help. Although Rama was the legitimate heir to the throne of Dasharatha, his father, he was condemned to exile for 14 long years due to a promise that his father made to his second wife. During this exile in the forest he married his virtuous wife, Sita (meaning "Furrow"), who was abducted by Ravana, the king of the demons, and taken to the island of Lanka, modern-day Sri Lanka. Rama, with the aid of Hanumat, the wind god's son and his loyal brother Lakshmana, who had accompanied him into exile, finally managed to kill Ravana and his legion, freeing Sita and taking her triumphantly back to Ayodhya, where he ascended the throne as the kingdom's legitimate ruler.

This happy ending, however, is only partial because Rama allowed himself to be influenced by the doubts that his people nourished regarding Sita's chastity during her abduction and consequently banished her. As testimony to Sita's fidelity, the Earth opened up and took Sita away to a better world, while Rama prostrate with grief, was told of his divine nature and assured that he would meet Sita-Laskshmi again in heaven.

146-147 - This illustration of the *Mahabharata* shows Krishna and Arjuna in the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas (Museum of Indian Art, Berlin).

147 bottom - This miniature of the *Mahabharata* shows the god Ganesha according to the traditional iconography, with four arms but only one tusk (Museum of Indian Art, Berlin).

While the themes treated by the *Ramayana* concentrate on worldly life and the establishment of the dharma experienced as the supreme good, the *Mahabharata* constitutes a compendium of all traditional Brahmanic knowledge, and focuses in particular on the four aims of life: *dharma, artha, kama* and *moksha* and their reciprocal relationships. This mammoth epic is the largest in the history of mankind and is divided into 100 sections gathered in 18 books, with a total of over 100,000 couplets. It tells the story of the rivalry between two families of cousins, the 100 Kauravas and the 5 Pandavas, both of whom were descendents of the mythical ancestor Bharata. Following their defeat in a disastrous game of dice, the Pandavas were forced into exile for 12 years and on their return the Kauravas broke their previous agreement and refused to give them back the kingdom. The dispute between the two families led to an epic war, apparently fought around 3139 BC, that lasted 18 days and culminated on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, close to modern-day Delhi.

The outcome of the battle was determined by the presence of Krishna among the Pandavas, who were thus destined to win. Chapters 25-42 of Book VI contain the best-loved Hindu work of all times: the *Bhagavad-Gita*, ("Song of the Lord"), which contains the teachings of Krishna, in the role of charioteer, to the warrior hero Arjuna, whose determination wavers when faced with the need to kill his own kinsmen and his venerated masters. Krishna consoles Arjuna by explaining to him that the immortal soul (*atman*) of each individual cannot be killed by anyone and also that those who act without self-interest in the fruits of their action are not subject to the laws of *karman*. Indifference toward success or failure opens the way to *moksha*, liberation, even though it does not exempt the individual from the action demanded by his rank, social position and talent. In addition to this discipline of action, Krishna also introduced *karma yoga*, another path that opens the way to *moksha*: the way of *bhakti*, devotion. Krishna said, "Those ever steadfast devotees who worship with supreme faith by fixing their mind on Me as personal God, I consider them to be the best yogis."

THE INDIAN MIDDLE AGES (AD 510-1192)

The Northern Kingdoms
page 150

The Sensuality of Art
page 170

Southern and Central India
page 172

Eastern India
page 198

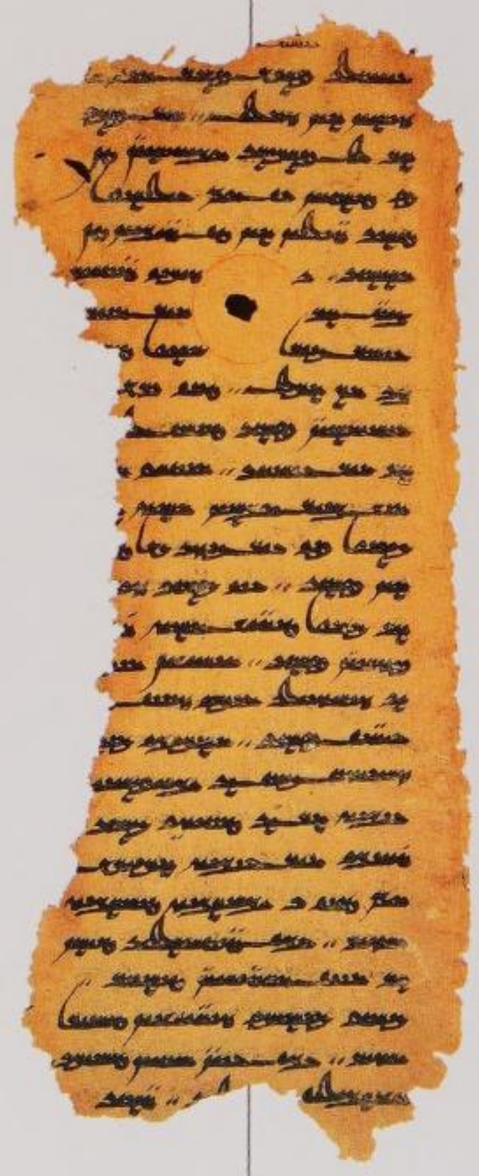
齋盡造慶讚供養

The final attempt at reuniting northern India, prior to its medieval fragmentation into a series of kingdoms striving for limited supremacy, was made by Harshavardhana (AD 606-646). His feats and empire are extensively described in the *Harshacarita*, a biography of the ruler written by Bana, one of the greatest Sanskrit writers, and the chronicles of the Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang, who spent the period 630-643 in India, with long stays in the regions belonging to Harshavardhana's kingdom. After having inherited a solid power base centered on the capital Thaneshwar, north of modern-day Delhi, from his father by highly adventurous means, Harshavardhana conducted an impressive series of military campaigns that allowed him to conquer the whole of northern India east of the Punjab, as far as Bihar and most of Bengal. His empire was almost as large as that of the Guptas, comprising India from the Punjab to northern Orissa and from the Himalayas to the Narmada River. Harshavardhana soon turned his sights to southern India, but his attempt to conquer the Deccan (630), resulted in a resounding defeat by the Chalukya king Pulakeshin II of Badami. No northern Indian ruler attempted to conquer the south of the country for almost 600 years after Harshavardhana, testifying to the end of the hegemony of the northern empires over the entire of India and the new centrality of the Deccan and southern India in medieval political strategies.

Harshavardhana was not only a great military leader and a good administrator, but also an enthusiastic scholar of Sanskrit language and literature and a generous supporter of Buddhism. However, the king had eclectic religious views and Hinduism achieved growing popularity during his enlightened rule. Harshavardhana was a sort of "Oriental Hadrian" who, like that Roman emperor, traveled from one end to the other of his empire to oversee its administration. His choice to make Kanauj the capital of his kingdom instead of the old imperial city of Pataliputra effectively shifted the center of northern Indian history for many centuries to come, assisting the political emergence of the tribes documented in northern India.

Following Harshavardhana's death, his empire broke up, giving rise to the scenario that characterized medieval India, where political power converged in four main regional concentrations corresponding to the northern, eastern, central and southern areas of the country. Each of these regions witnessed the establishment of one or more successive dominant dynasties that were nonetheless incapable of extending their influence beyond their own realms.

During the 8th century the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty rose to power in Kanauj and the surrounding areas and its first ruler, Vatsaraja, conquered much of Rajasthan and northwestern India in 783. At the same time the first kings of the Pala dynasty of Bengal dethroned the last Gupta ruler of Magadha and started to extend their dominions westward, leading to the inevitable clash of the two dynasties. One of the characteristics of the Pala dynasty was its generous patronage of Buddhist monasteries and universities, including the famous one in Malanda, which continued to prosper in the kingdom while those in the rest of India declined.



149 - The temple of Surya at Konarak (ca. 1238-1258) represents the sun god's chariot and originally had 24 wheels and was drawn by 7 horses. Each wheel measures almost 10 ft (3 m) across and is elaborately decorated.

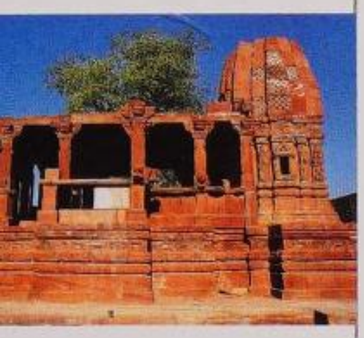
150 - This silk painting illustrates the contacts between China and India established by monks traveling between the two countries (Musée Guimet, Paris).

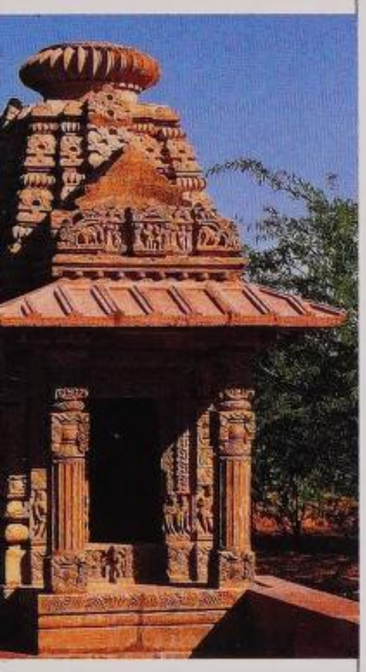
151 top - This figure of a Chinese pilgrim and interpreter represents the propagation of Buddhist thought from India (British Museum, London).

151 bottom - The biography of the monk Xuanzang is one of the travel diaries written by the Chinese who visited India (Musée Guimet, Paris).

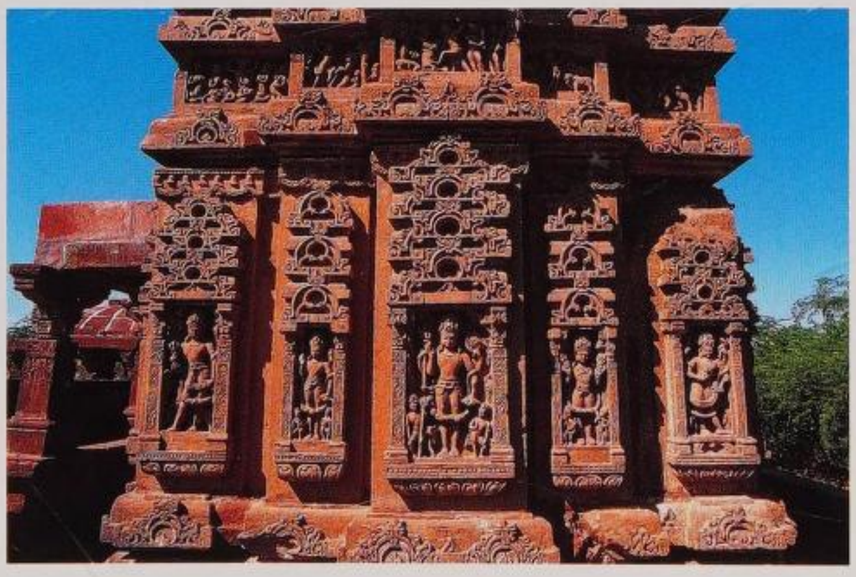
152-153 - This sculpture represents a *candrashila* ("moon stone"), a semicircular threshold situated at the entrance to a sanctuary and, in this case, decorated with the figure of the Buddha in *bhumisparsa-mudra*, invoking the earth as a witness.

153 - This statue of Bodhisattva Lokanatha dates from the time of the Pala dynasty. The patronage of the Pala rulers allowed the partial survival of the Buddhist presence in India until the beginning of the 13th century, when the Afghan-Turks destroyed the last Buddhist monasteries and universities (Musée Guimet, Paris).

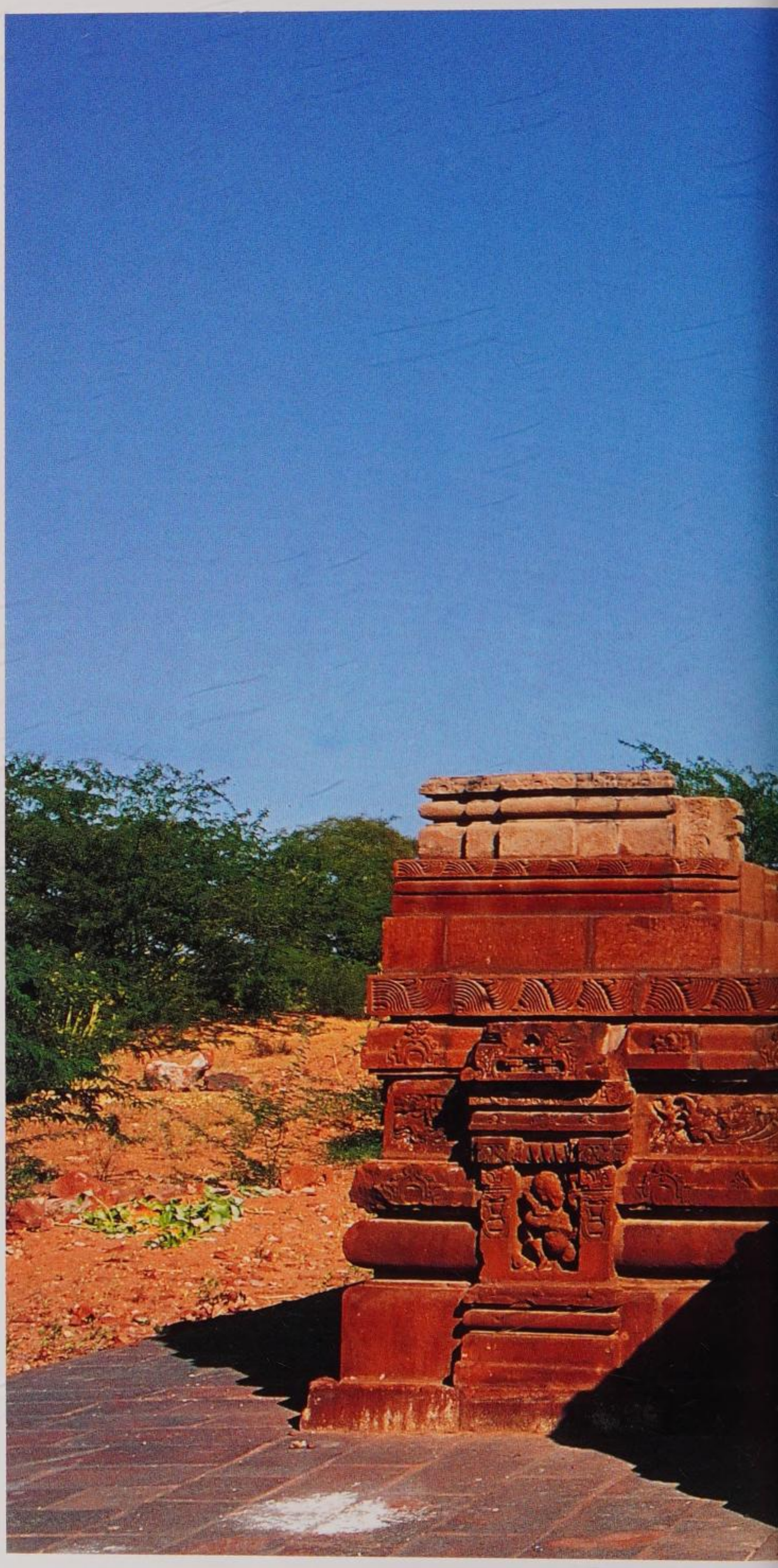




The Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty reached its peak in the 9th century under king Mihira Bhoja, extending over Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Ganges and Yamuna valleys, which formed a bastion against the Arabs, who had settled in Sind and the Punjab in 711. The 8th, 9th and 10th centuries saw great cultural fertility in the Gurjara-Pratihara kingdom. Some of the most accomplished Gurjara-Pratihara sculptures come from the group of temples at Osian, 37 miles from Jodhpur, in Rajasthan. The 20 or so buildings from the 8th to 10th centuries include three temples dedicated to Harihara, the syncretic deity combining Shiva and Vishnu; two consecrated to Surya; the famous Pipla Devi temple in honor of Durga, who slew the buffalo-demon; and the Mahavira Jain temple. The Ambika Mata temple at Jagat, 35 miles from Udaipur, with its splendid array of reliefs depicting *surasundaris* (heavenly nymphs) in differing poses, is a masterpiece of Gurjara-Pratihara architecture. The Harsat-Mata temple at Abaneri is also extensively decorated with fine 9th-century sculptures, including charming



figures of amorous couples (*mithunas*), in various poses. The dynasty started to decline during the 10th century, following Mahipala of Kanauj's defeat by Indra III of the central Indian Rastrakuta dynasty, which allowed for the emergence of many small princedoms. The most famous included the Solanki dynasty that dominated Gujarat and Kathiawar between the 10th and 12th centuries, the Candella who ruled Bundelkhand during the same period, and the Paramara who rose to power in Malwa between the 10th and 11th centuries.

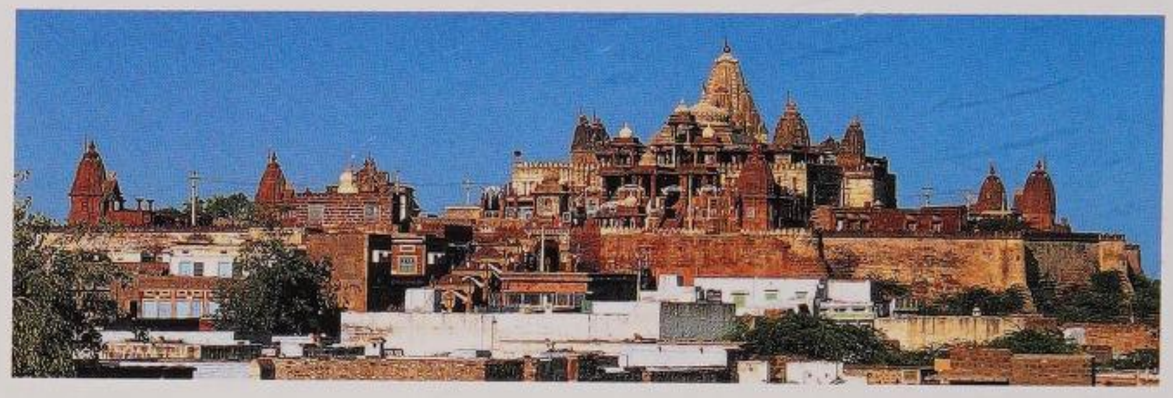


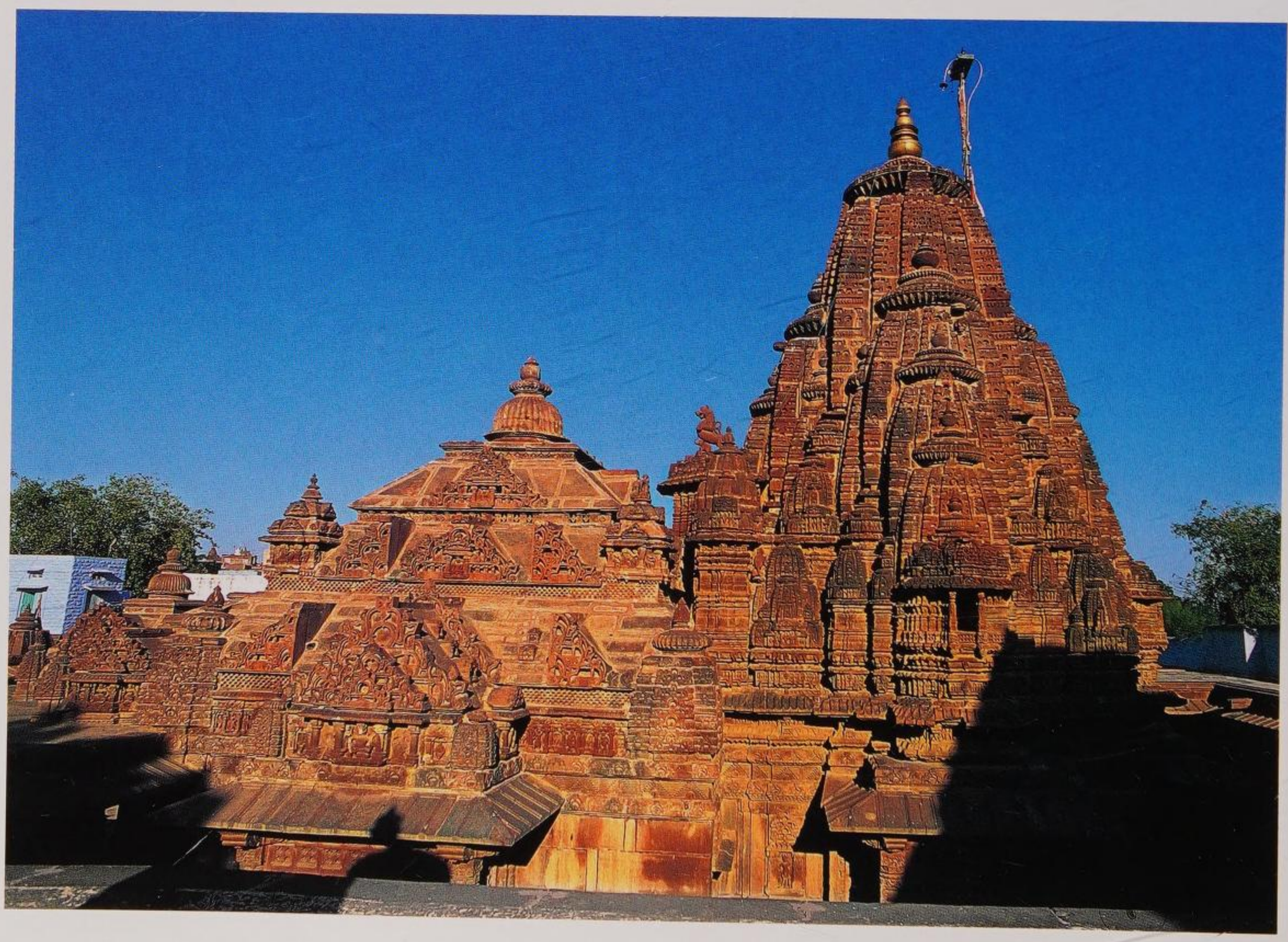
154 TOP - THIS BUILDING IS THE TEMPLE OF HARIHARA AT OSIAN.

154 CENTER - THE SMALL SANCTUARY AT OSIAN IS TOPPED BY AN *AMALAKA*.

154 BOTTOM - THE TEMPLE AT OSIAN HAS ORNAMENTAL MOTIFS AND SCULPTURES.

154-155 - FIVE SANCTUARIES COMPOSE THE TEMPLE OF HARIHARA.

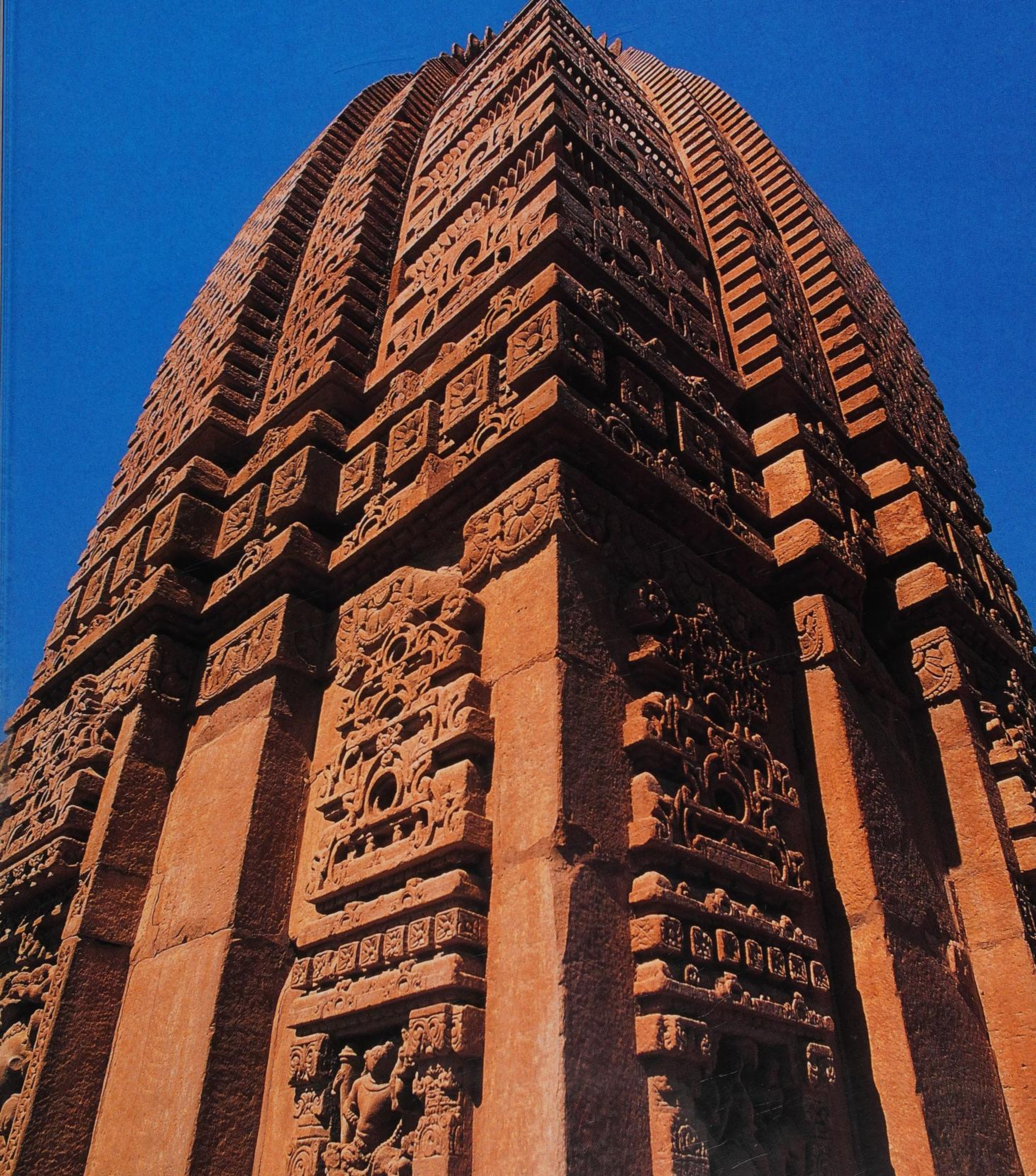


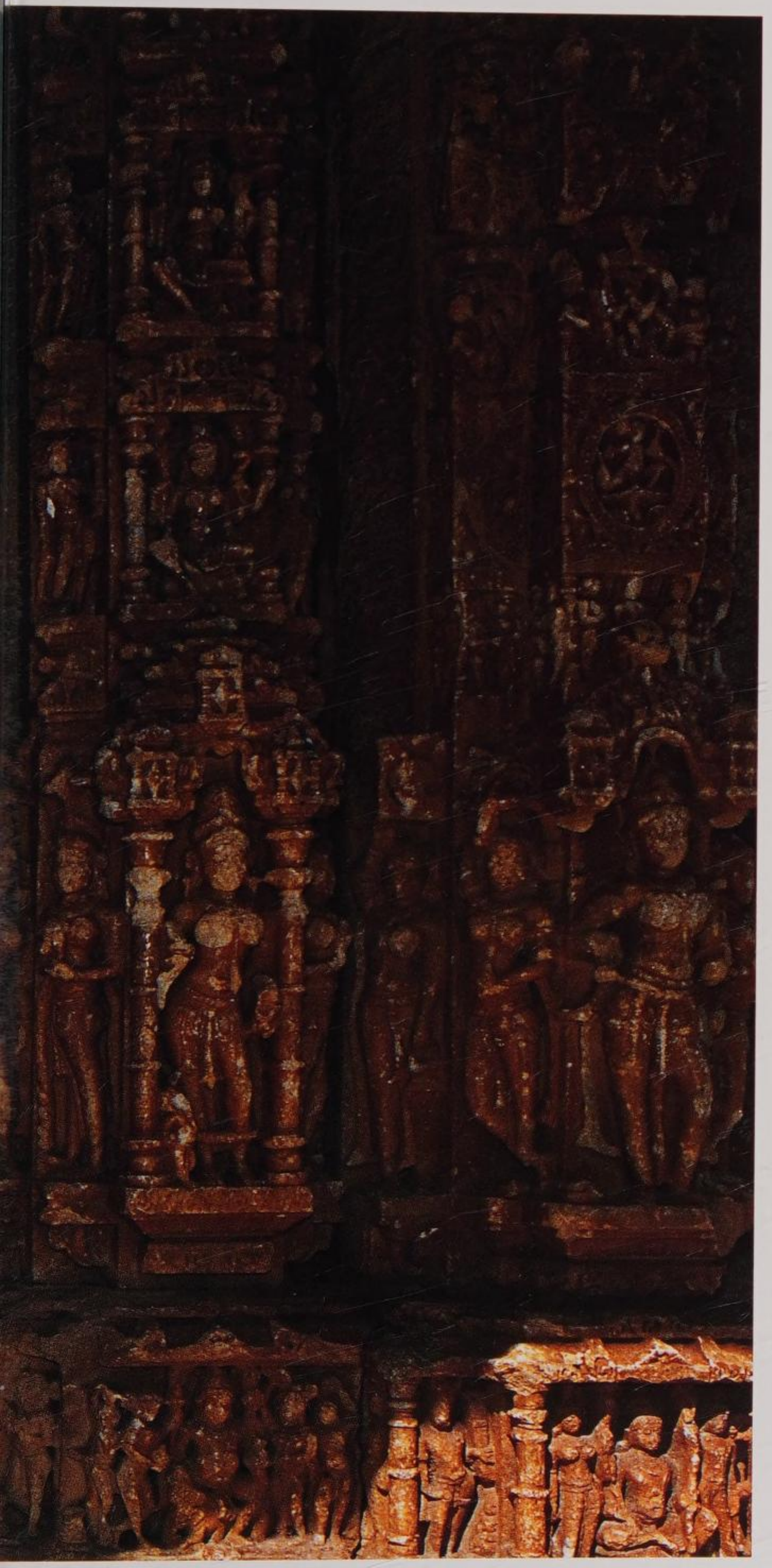


156 TOP - OSIAN IS A VILLAGE ABOUT 30 MILES FROM JODHPUR AND IS FAMOUS FOR ITS NUMEROUS TEMPLES DATING FROM THE PERIOD OF THE GURJARA-PRATIHARA DYNASTY, MANY OF WHICH ARE DEDICATED TO VISHNU.

156 BOTTOM - HINDU TEMPLES ARE ALWAYS COMPOSED OF THE SAME ELEMENTS: THE CELLA (*GARBHAGRIHA*), THE PAVILION (*MANDAPA*) AND THE SUPERSTRUCTURE THAT RISES ABOVE THE CELLA, LIKE THAT OF THE TEMPLES AT OSIAN.

157 - IN NORTHERN TEMPLES THE CELLA IS SURMOUNTED BY A *SHIKHARA* (LITERALLY, "MOUNTAIN PEAK"), WHICH SYMBOLIZES MOUNT MERU, THE AXIS MUNDI AND MYTHICAL HOME OF THE GODS, AND IS TOPPED BY AN *AMALAKA*.

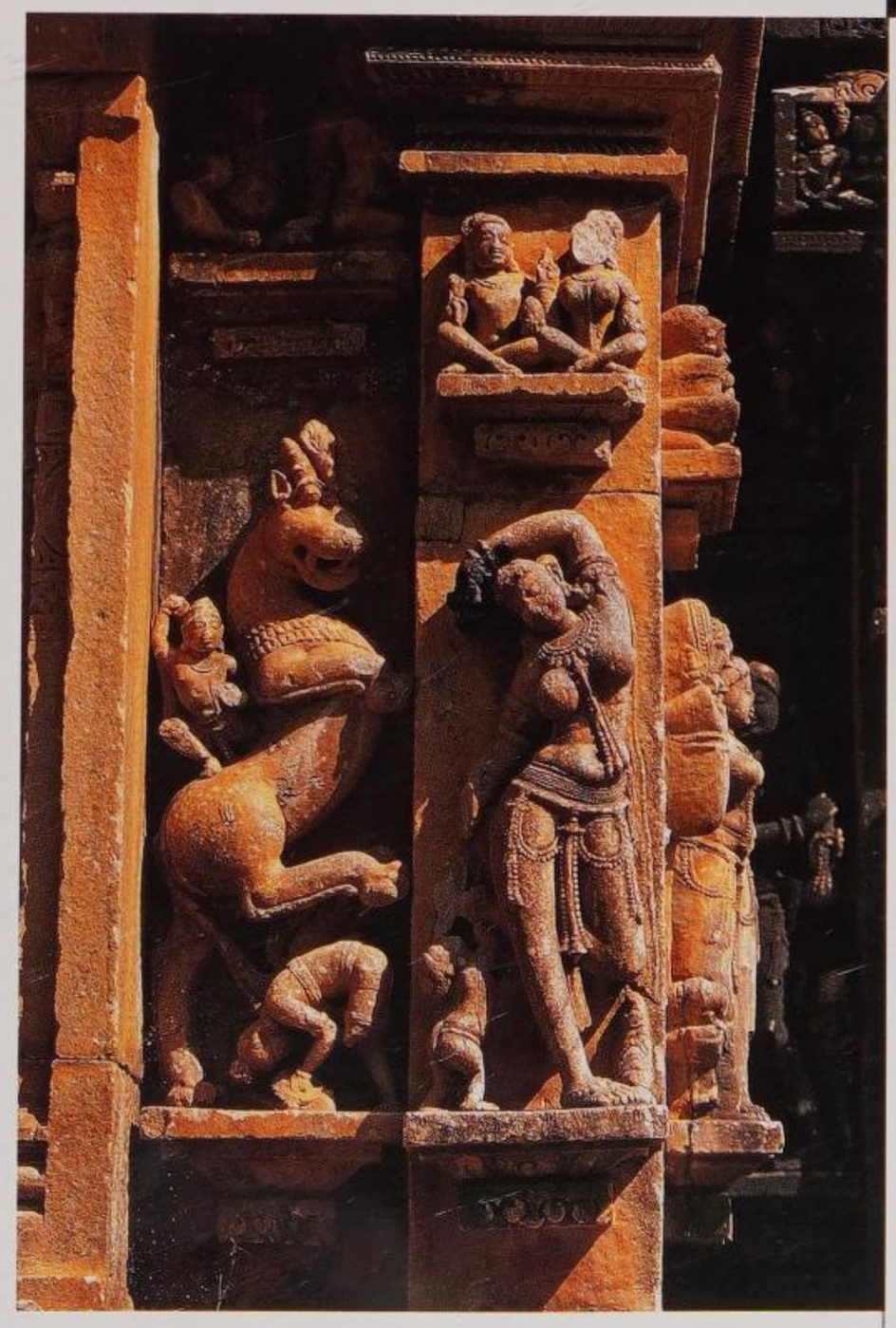


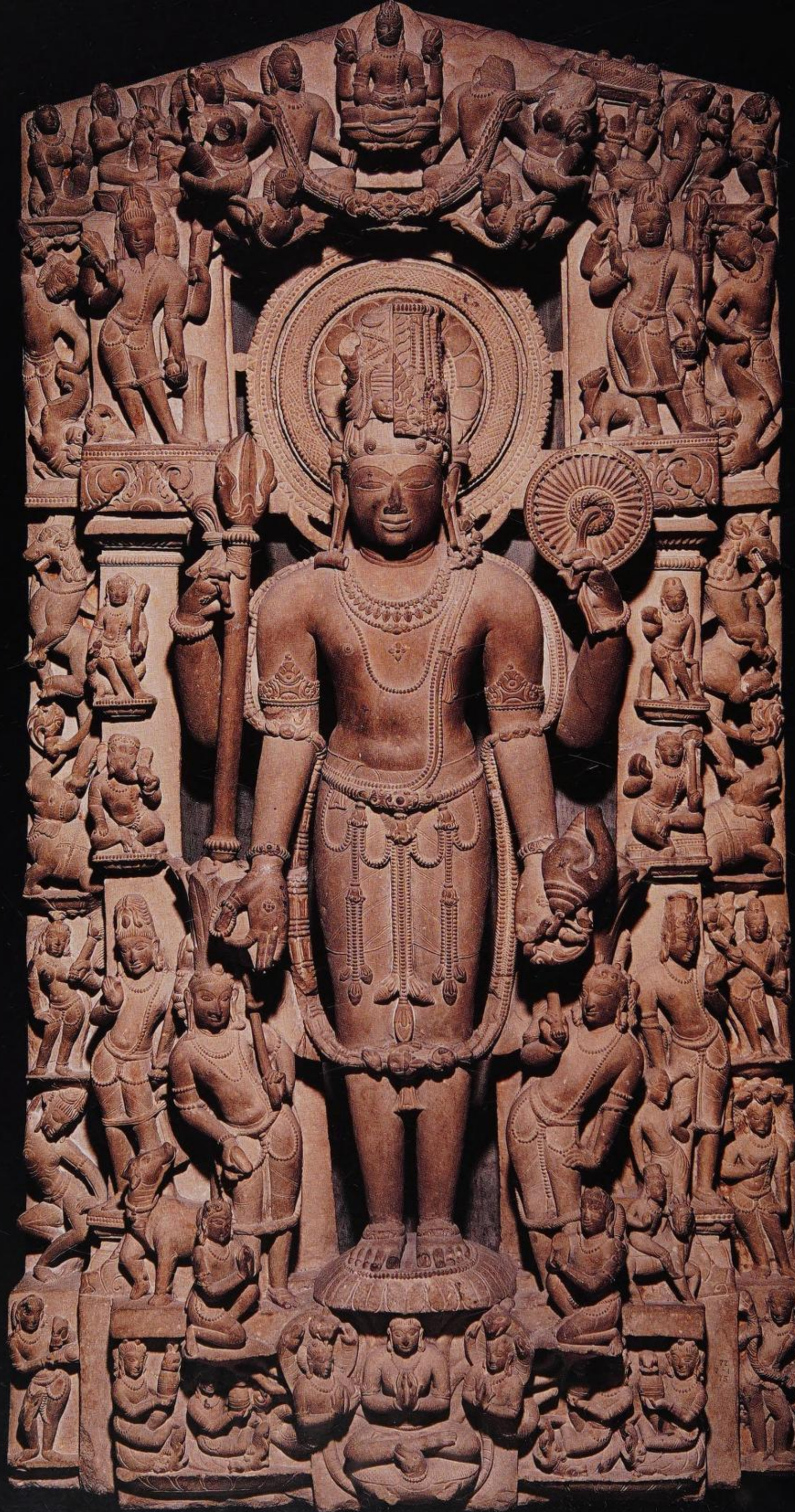


158-159 - The temple at Jagat is similar to the type exemplified by the Khajuraho complex. Indeed, it is built on a high platform and has an inner sanctuary and an assembly hall with carved columns and projections on the four sides.

159 top - The numerous figures depicted in the temple at Jagat testify to its importance in the worship of the goddess Durga.

159 bottom - This relief from the temple at Jagat depicts an Apsara (a heavenly nymph at Indra's court), whose task was to delight the warriors who had fallen in battle and were thus destined for Indra's paradise. The *Ramayana* recounts that these voluptuous nymphs were born from the churning of the milky ocean and are considered the companions of the Gandharvas.



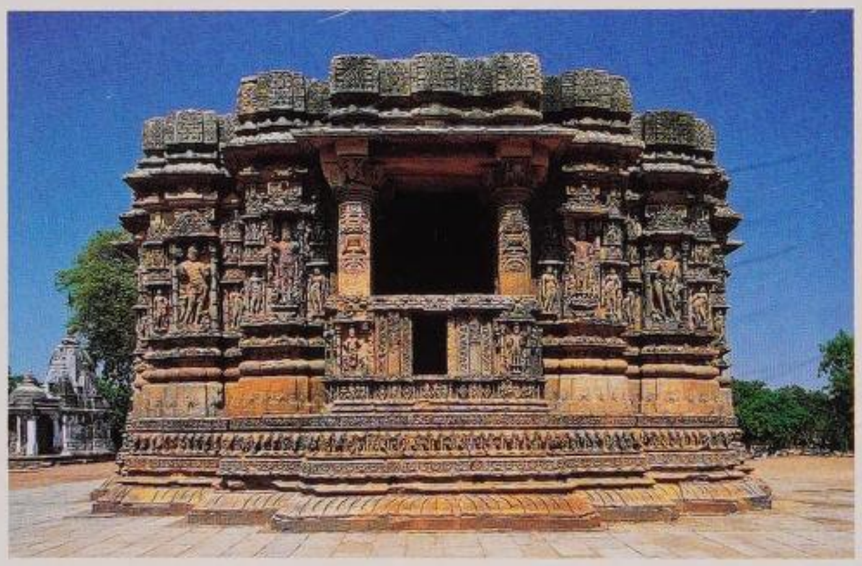


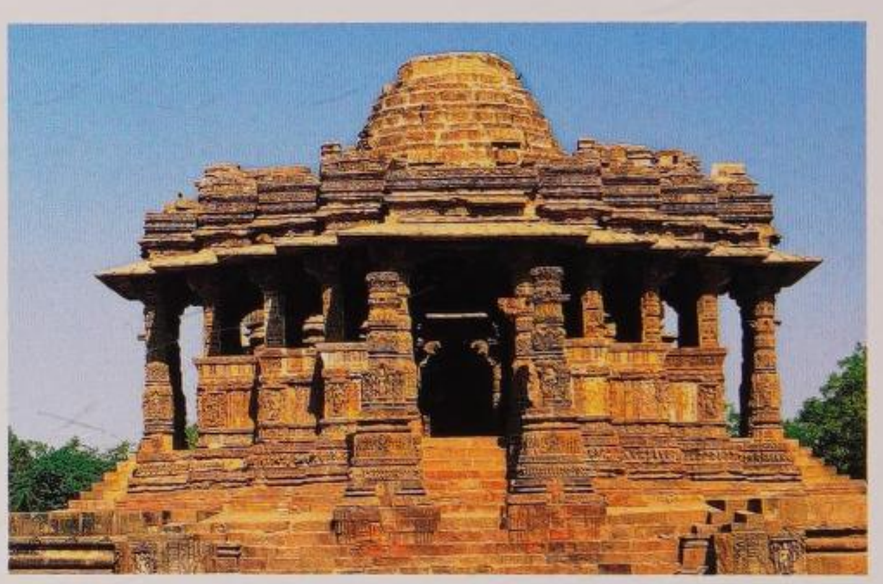
160 - This sandstone stele depicts Harihara ("He who is both Vishnu and Shiva," venerated at Osian), a murti of Shiva whose right half is represented as Shiva and left half as Vishnu (British Museum, London).

161 - This sandstone sculpture depicts Surya to whom two temples at Osian are dedicated, accompanied by his female attendants who personify two aspects of dawn: Ushas, who is sometimes considered the god's lover and intently follows in his footsteps, and Pratyusha. Aruna, another personification of the dawn, who drives the god's chariot, is shown at Surya's feet (British Museum, London).

The heights reached by the Solanki artistic tradition can be seen in the temple at Modhera, in Gujarat, dedicated to the sun god Surya in 1026 by Bhima I, and in the white marble Dilwara Jain temples on Mount Abu, built by Vastupal, a minister of the king Viradhavala. The first is characterized by a series of colonnaded additions and a wide terrace on a basement that overlooks the Ramakunda, a spectacular rectangular pool with steps leading down to the water, located right in front of the temple and marked at the corners by miniature *shikharas*. The high basement is decorated with carved cornices and the main wall with exceptionally rich sculptural work, including depictions of *dikpalas*, the divine guardians of the eight regions of the universe, in their respective quarters; other deities housed in niches, of varying size according to the importance of each figure; and numerous figures of nymphs, dancers, musicians, heroines, animals, worshippers, birds and floral motifs that together form an outstandingly rich collection of exquisitely carved decorative elements.

The skilled craftsmanship of the sculpture of the Dilwara temples is equally astounding. While their outward appearance is plain and austere, their interiors are carved with extreme precision, elegance and painstaking detail. It is said that these sculptures were not carved by chisels, but by rubbing the stone and indeed the marble here has shed its lithic nature to yield to the desire for plastic harmony with which the entire space is pervaded. The oldest of the Dilwara temples is dedicated to Adinatha and is composed of a central shrine, a smaller adjoining room and a larger hall for audiences.





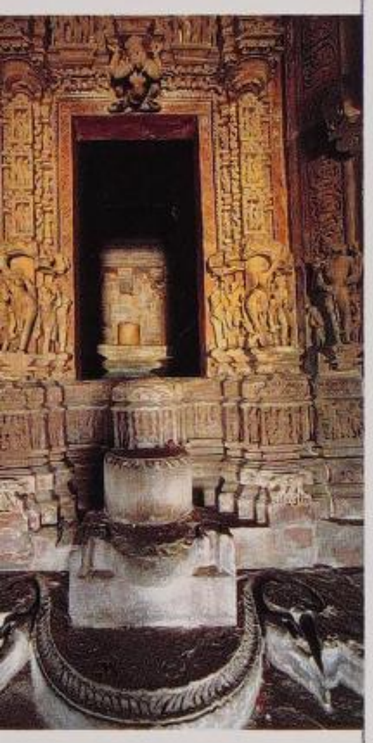
162 TOP LEFT - THE TEMPLE AT MODHERA IS DIVIDED INTO A *GUDHAMANDAPA* (ROOFED PAVILION), PRECEDED BY A PORCH AND ONCE COVERED WITH A PYRAMIDAL ROOF, AND A *GARBAGRIHA* (CELLA SURROUNDED BY AN AMBULATORY), WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY SURMOUNTED BY A *SHIKHARA*.

162 TOP RIGHT - THE *SABHAMANDAPA* OF MODHERA WAS PROBABLY USED FOR DANCING.

162 BOTTOM - THIS RELIEF FROM ONE OF THE SHRINES AROUND THE RAMAKUNDA REPRESENTS THE GOD VISHNU SLEEPING IN THE COILS OF THE SERPENT SHESHA.

163 - THE TEMPLE AT MODHERA IS THE GREATEST MASTERPIECE OF GUJARATI ARCHITECTURE AND WAS BUILT IN 1026 BY BHIMA I OF THE SOLANKI DYNASTY. THE INNER COLUMNS SUPPORT A CENTRAL DOMED CEILING AND ARE COMPOSED OF SPLENDIDLY CARVED DRUMS.

164-165 - THE MOST IMPRESSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MODHERA TEMPLE IS THE RAMAKUNDA, A RECTANGULAR POOL IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE, WITH GEOMETRIC STEPS MARKED BY LITTLE NICHES FOR THE DEITIES ALONG THE SIDES, AND MINIATURE *SHIKHARAS* AT THE CORNERS.



The Candella dynasty was responsible for the construction of one of the greatest masterpieces of medieval Indian architecture: the Khajuraho temples. The Candellas were originally feudal vassals of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty and asserted their independence under King Dhanga (950-1002). They established their capital at Khajuraho, where it appears that 80 temples were built, although today only around 30 remain. The surviving buildings are mainly Hindu, except for a group of Jain temples that are more austere in terms of the subjects of their decorative schemes. The Khajuraho temples represent the most important example of what are known as *sekhari* (or cluster) *shikharas*, in which the main structure is reproduced in a series of smaller *shikharas* of various sizes. The soft yellow sandstone temples at Khajuraho have a cruciform plan, with the longer axis oriented east-west.

The temples are usually built on a high terrace decorated with long friezes and feature a main cella, an anteroom or vestibule connecting it to the pillared hall (*mandapa*), and a rectangular porch accessed by a long flight of stairs. An ambulatory extends around the main cella. One of the oldest buildings is that known as the Temple of the 64 Yoginis, built at the end of the 9th century with granite blocks without mortar. This shrine, dedicated to the yoginis (female deities with magical and esoteric powers), is composed of 64 undecorated cells aligned around a courtyard with the small sanctuary of the Great Goddess at its center.

They are extraordinarily richly decorated with depictions of deities, amorous couples, heavenly nymphs, real or fantastic animals, plant and geometric motifs, ascetics and warriors. The temple of Lakshmana, commenced by Yashovarman I and completed by his son Dhanga in 954, stands on a platform adorned with a relief depicting a procession of horsemen, warriors, elephants and orgiastic groups. Indeed, part of Khajuraho's fame is due to the many depictions of *mithunas* (sexual unions), and erotic scenes on the walls of the temples. The reason behind the choice of these ornamental motives, which often also involve animals, is still a mystery, although several theories have been proposed. Another recurrent theme, which is less striking but equally characteristic of the site, is that of the lion and the horseman, the emblem of the dynasty and the symbol of the confrontation between the warrior prince and the power and fame embodied by the animal. However, Khajuraho's most magnificent work of architecture is represented by the Shaivite temple of Kanarya Mahadeva, built between 1017 and 1029. Considered the masterpiece of the Candella artists, this temple is adorned with 650 statues and is particularly interesting for its extensive narration of what appears to be either the history of the prince who ordered its construction or perhaps the general history of the dynasty.

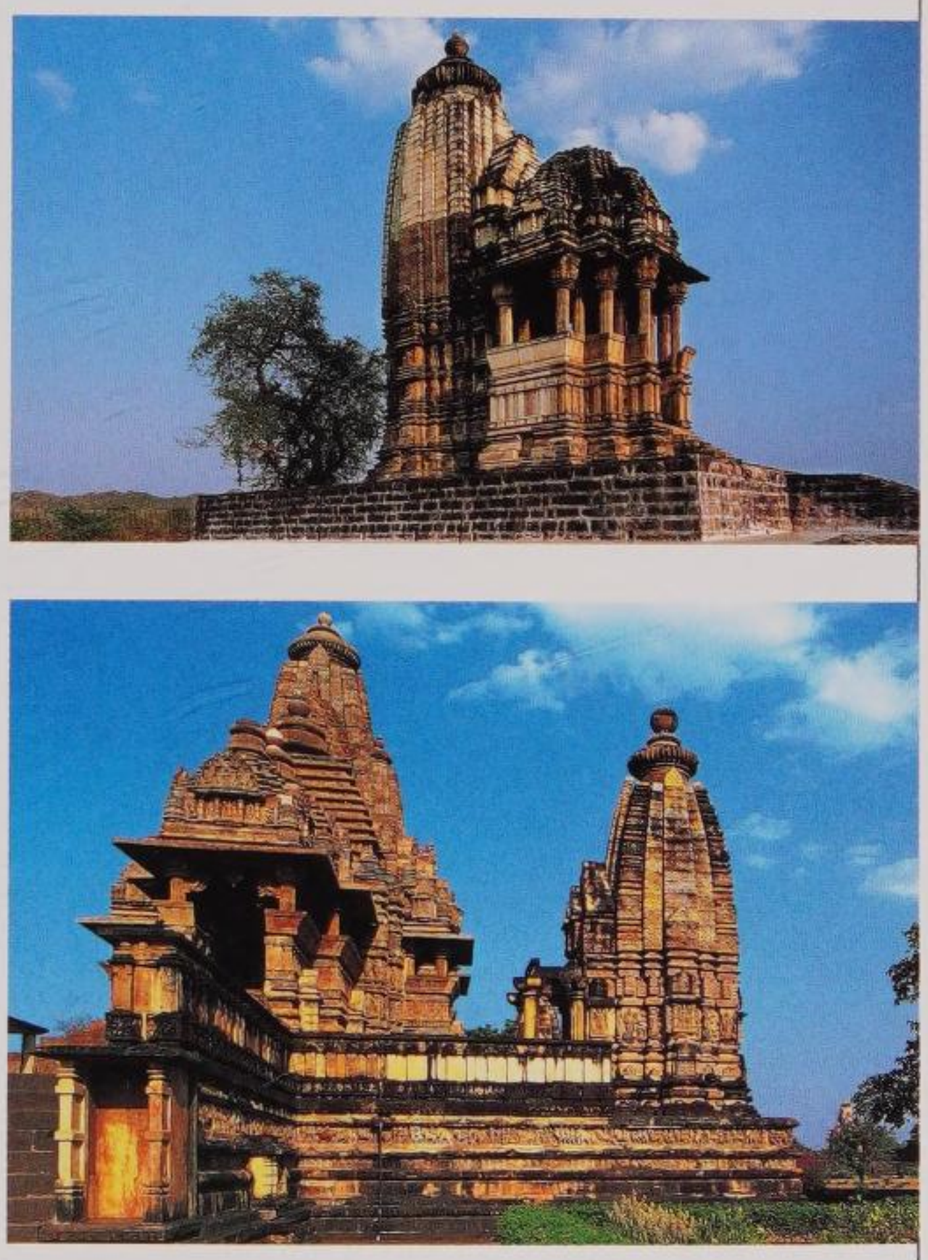
The Paramaras came to power in the Malwa region around the 10th century and reached their height during the following one, when their possessions came to include several parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and even the Deccan. The Pamarama dynasty traces its origins back to the magnificent fire

166 LEFT - THE CELLA OF THE *MAHAMANDAPA* OF KANDARIYA MAHADEVA AT KHAJURAHO HOUSES A *LINGA*, THE SYMBOL OF THE GOD SHIVA.

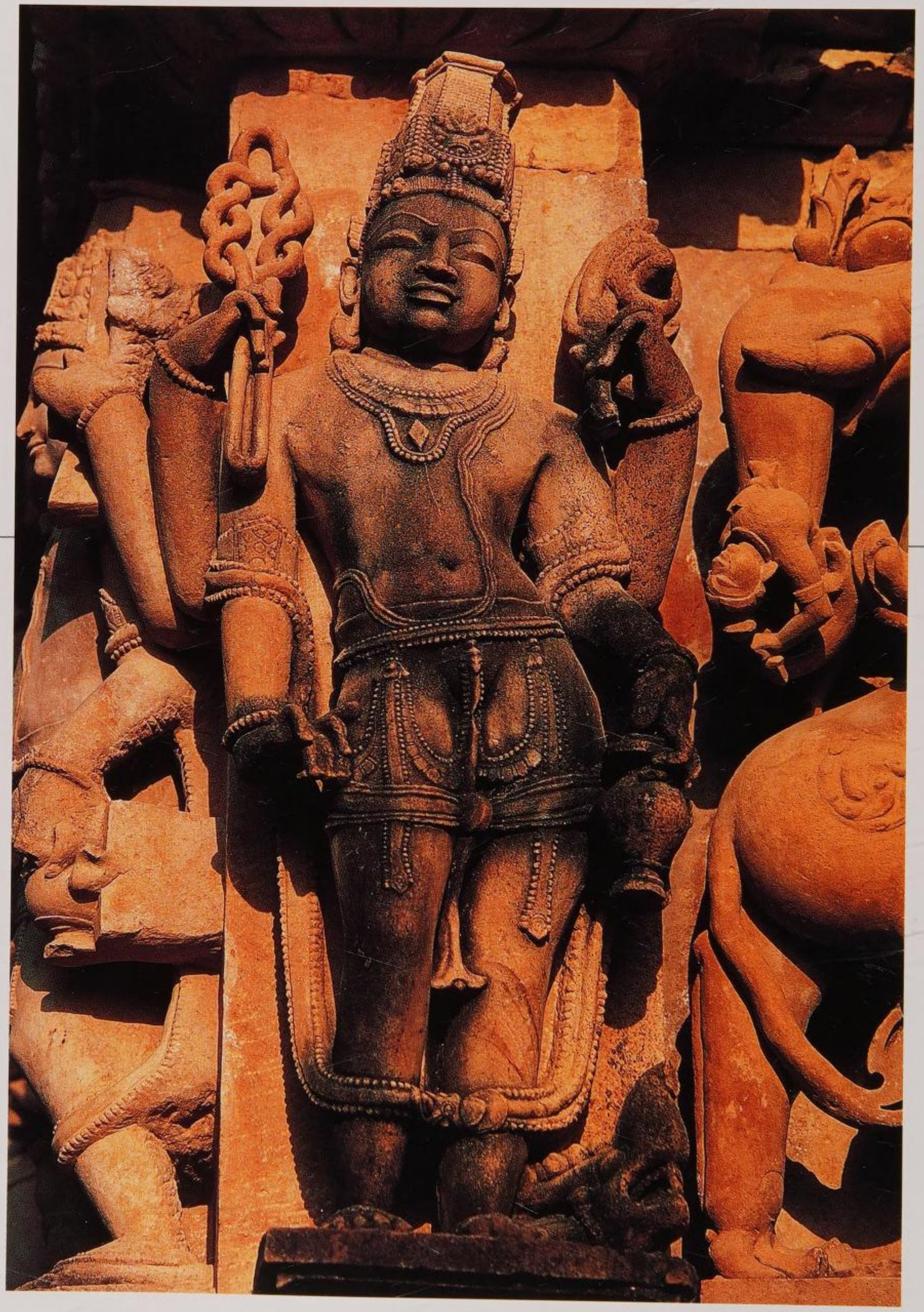
166-167 - THE TEMPLE OF KANDARIYA MAHADEVA IS AN EXAMPLE OF CANDELLA ARCHITECTURE AND THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE SANCTUARIES AT KHAJURAHO.

167 TOP - THE BALCONIES WITH SEATS RUN AROUND THE OPEN WALLS AT THE CHATURBHUJ TEMPLE AT KHAJURAHO.

167 BOTTOM - THE TEMPLE OF LAKSHMANA AT KHAJURAHO WAS BUILT BY YASHOVARMAN I AND DHANGA.



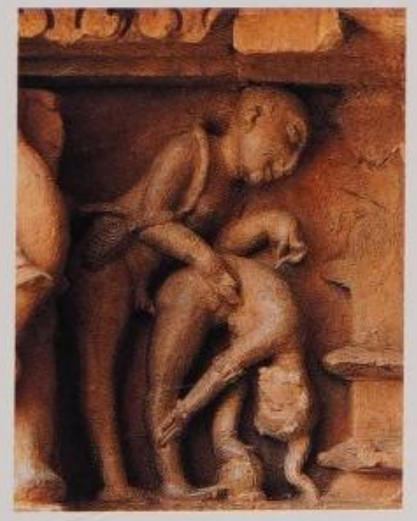
ceremony that, according to a well-attested tradition, purified all the Rajput clans (the indigenous tribes of northeast India that mixed with the peoples of central Asian extraction who arrived in India with the Huns) according them Kshatriya status. This rite was celebrated on Mount Abu in AD 747 by the *rishi* Vasishta. The greatest ruler of the dynasty was Bhoja, who combined rare military talents with prodigious intellectual prowess and proverbial liberality. He is remembered for the construction of the large artificial lake of Bhojpur, the city that he himself founded, in which he ordered the building of a monumental Shaivite temple. He also founded a people's university at Dhara, known as Bhojsala, and was the author of several treatises on architecture, poetry, philosophy, astronomy and lexicography. As he himself was a an authority in the field of architecture, he enjoyed building examples of the monuments that he described in his treatises, for example the roof type known as *bhumija*, which became popular in both in the Malwa region and beyond.

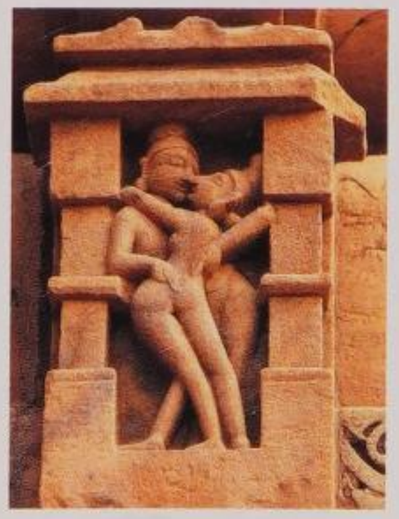


168 - This relief from the Parshvanatha temple at Khajuraho depicts the Vedic god Varuna, the upholder of cosmic order and moral law.

169 - The decorative scheme of the Duladeo temple at Khajuraho features three registers of sculptures of deities and heavenly spirits on a high base and employs skillful perspective effects.

The manifestly erotic decorations of Khajuraho have been the source of some embarrassment among scholars, who were long perplexed about their presence in a sacred setting such as a Hindu temple. After having ruled out the hypothesis that the temple reproduces the suggestions of the *Kamasutra* – a text whose premises and contents are often misunderstood – various theories have been proposed. Some claim that the *mithuna* figures have an apotropaic function, aimed at protecting the temple from calamities such as lightning or the evil eye, in accordance with popular belief. Others maintain that the acrobatic erotic feats depicted by the Candella artists constitute a sort of test of the spirituality of devotees, who must not be disturbed or fascinated by them. As the builders of the Khajuraho temples belonged to the Kapalika tantric sect, one of the most credible explanations points to the influence of several tantric schools, according to which the *mithuna* represents an ideal way of overcoming the polarity into which existence is split and of achieving the restoration of consciousness and union with the divine. Nonetheless, tantrism is an esoteric path, so it would seem surprising that it would entrust its message of salvation to the unconditioned use of the multitude that could admire the particular iconography of Khajuraho. Another possible explanation is that the manifestly erotic images conceal a meaning that can only be perceived by initiates. A final theory views the creation of these images as an inheritance of the ancient shamanistic tradition of orgiastic fertility rites, aimed at ensuring the fertility of the kingdom and the grace of the gods. The fact that the images adorn the outside walls of the temple creates a contrast between the sexual urge and the ascetic tension that achieves a sort of figurative equilibrium here. While the explicit sexual references of the Khajuraho temples remain an enigma that fascinate scholars and arouse the curiosity of visitors, it should be noted that Indian religious literature often resorts to the metaphor of amorous passion to refer to the rapport that binds the devotee to God, and that *mithuna* figures (pairs of lovers embracing but not engaged in intercourse) are a recurrent motif in India's most ancient holy places, and particularly in Buddhist cave monasteries. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the *surasundari* figures represent the heavenly equivalent of the *devadasis*, the female servants of god, dancers skilled in the erotic arts, who lived in the temple, participating in the cult.





170 - This splendid Apsara that adorns the walls of the temple of Lakshmana displays the typical characteristics of Khajuraho portraits: elongated eyes, well-defined eyebrows and nose, prominent breasts and rich and elaborate jewelry.

171 top - The temple of Lakshmana is decorated with figures of warriors, heavenly spirits and erotic scenes.

171 bottom - Scholars have long sought the meaning of the erotic scenes of the temples at Khajuraho, but it remains a mystery.

While the history of India up until AD 500 coincides principally with the history of the northern part of the country, during the Middle Ages the central and southern regions acquired great importance and primacy. Many of the courts of the Deccan and the extreme south were characterized by great cultural vitality and considerable intellectual dynamism. This often extended to the rulers themselves, who were not only great statesmen and military leaders, but also brilliant intellectuals.

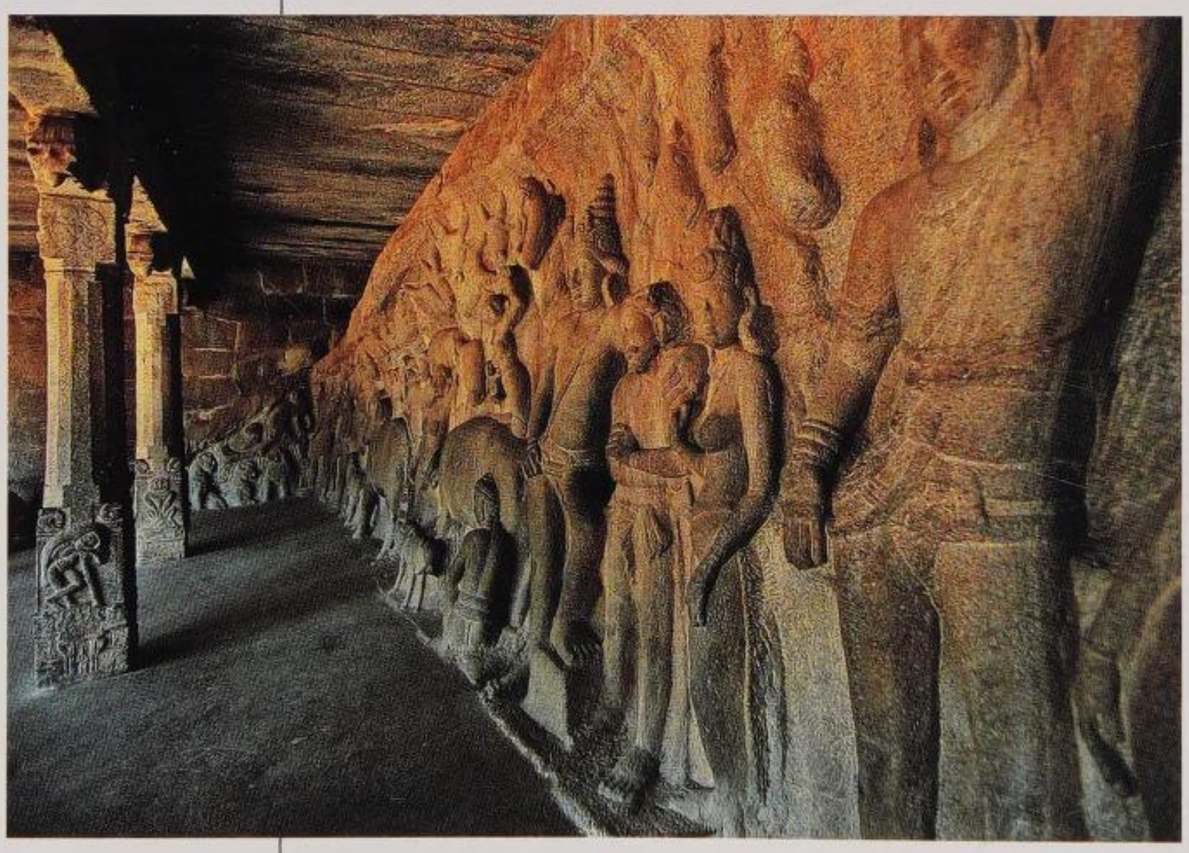
One of the most important dynasties of the Middle Ages was that of the Pallavas, who were particularly influential between the 6th and 9th centuries. Although their origins are rather controversial, historians are reasonably sure that they did not belong to the ancient tribal lineages of southern India, such as the Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras. Believed by some scholars to be descended from the Parthians of northwest India, the Pallavas first appeared in the 3rd century AD as officials of the Satavahana empire, from which they declared their independence following its decline. The political rise of the dynasty, which established its capital at Kanchipuram, was achieved by Simhavisnu (570-600), who successfully attacked the Kalabhras (tribal groups that had risen to the status of royal dignity under King Acchutavikkanta), extending his domains to the Krishna River estuary in the north and to the heart of the region of the Cholas, in the Kaveri Valley, in the south. Simhavisnu's son, Mahendravarman, was a talented artist as well as a ruler: painter, musician and poet, his great versatility is recalled in titles such as *vicitracitta* ("The Curious Minded"). He was responsible for the construction of the first cave temples in southern India, at Tiruchchirappalli, Tirukkalukunram, Kilmavilangai and Mandagappattu, where an inscription attests the king's satisfaction at having built a temple carved completely out of the rock, without the use of bricks, wood, metal or mortar.

172 - This Pallava sculpture represents one of the five human Buddhas (the fourth of which is Sakyamuni), and more precisely Maitreya, the Buddha of the future cosmic age (Government Museum, Chennai).

173 - This relief depicting Shiva with his consort Parvati dates back to the time of the Pallava dynasty, which contributed to the spread of Brahmanic culture in southern India (Musée Guimet, Paris).

Mahendravarman's successor, Narasimhavarman I (630-668), also known as Mamalla, invaded Badami, the capital of the Chalukyas, following persistent clashes. During this period Mahabalipuram, the main port of the Pallava kingdom, became an important trading center, from which the cultural influence of the Pallavas spread to Southeast Asia and Indochina. During Narasimhavarman's reign some of the finest and most famous cave temples in the history of Indian art were built in Mahabalipuram. These five monolithic temples were conceived as processional chariots of the gods (*rathas*) and are known by the names of the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, the five Pandava brothers and their joint wife Draupadi. However, the iconography of these temples actually has no connection with the events narrated in the *Mahabharata*, but instead refers to the cult of the principal Hindu deities.

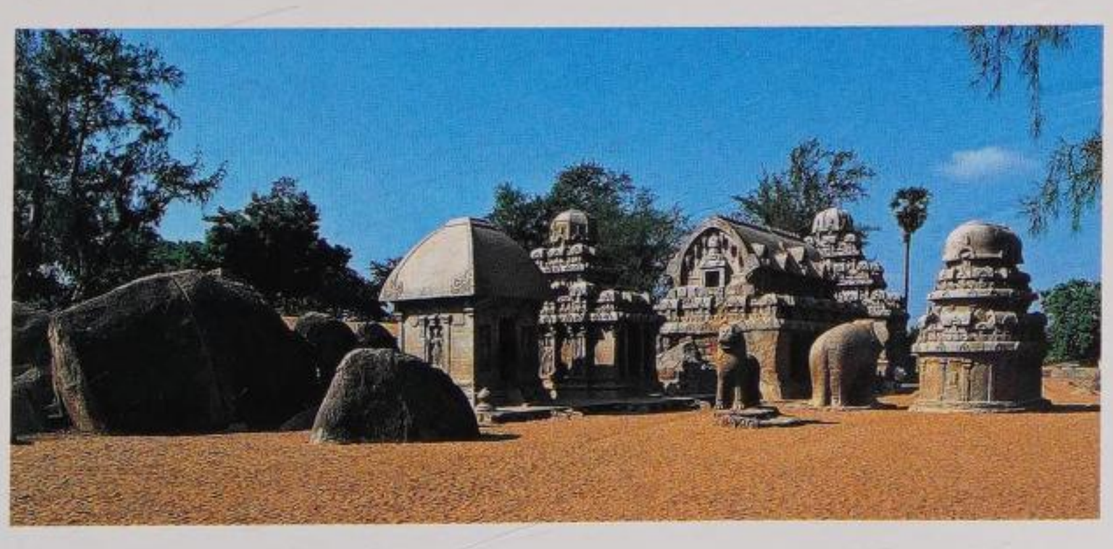
The diorite temples feature a particularly interesting range of roofs: that of the one known as Draupadi's temple (which is actually dedicated to Durga) imitates the thatched roof of a village hut, while the temple of Bhima has a barrel-shaped roof, which is clearly a stone interpretation of the wooden architecture of the halls used for gatherings and worship. The temple associated with the brothers Nakula and Sahadeva has a similar roof, although the apsidal form of the building recalls Buddhist architecture. The temples of Arjuna and Dharmaraja, whose roofs feature architectural elements aligned on different courses to form a stepped pyramid culminating in a carved stone, are particularly important for the subsequent development of temple architecture in southern India.

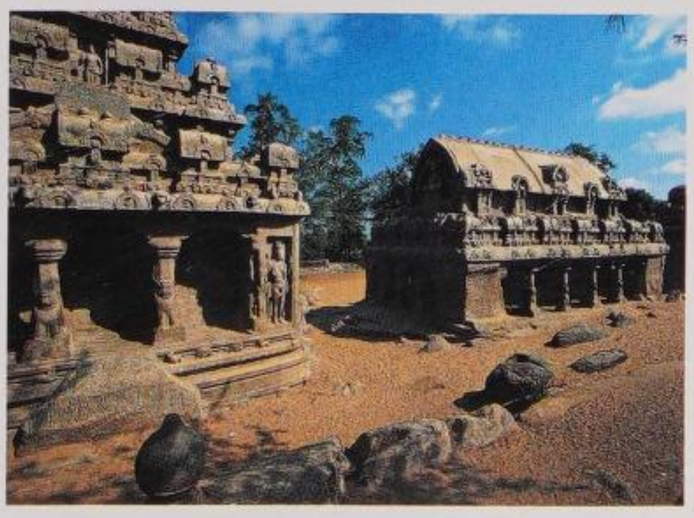


174 - This relief, in the *mandapa* of Krishna at Mahabalipuram, shows the god Vishnu raising the mountain Govardhana with his little finger to protect the shepherds from a flood.

174-175 - The five *rathas* (chariots of the gods) at Mahabalipuram are flanked by statues of the *vahanas*, the animal vehicles of the deities. The statue of an elephant – the mount of the god Indra – can be seen in the photograph.

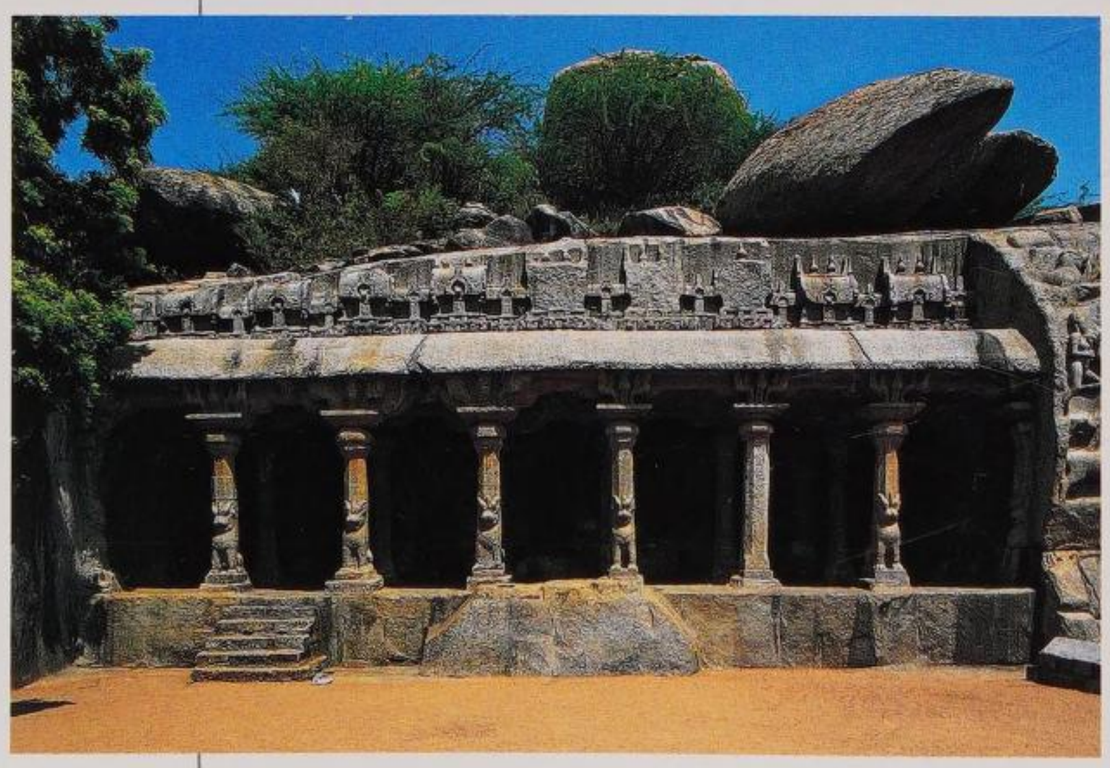
175 bottom - The five monolithic temples at Mahabalipuram are situated along the beach of the old Pallava capital.

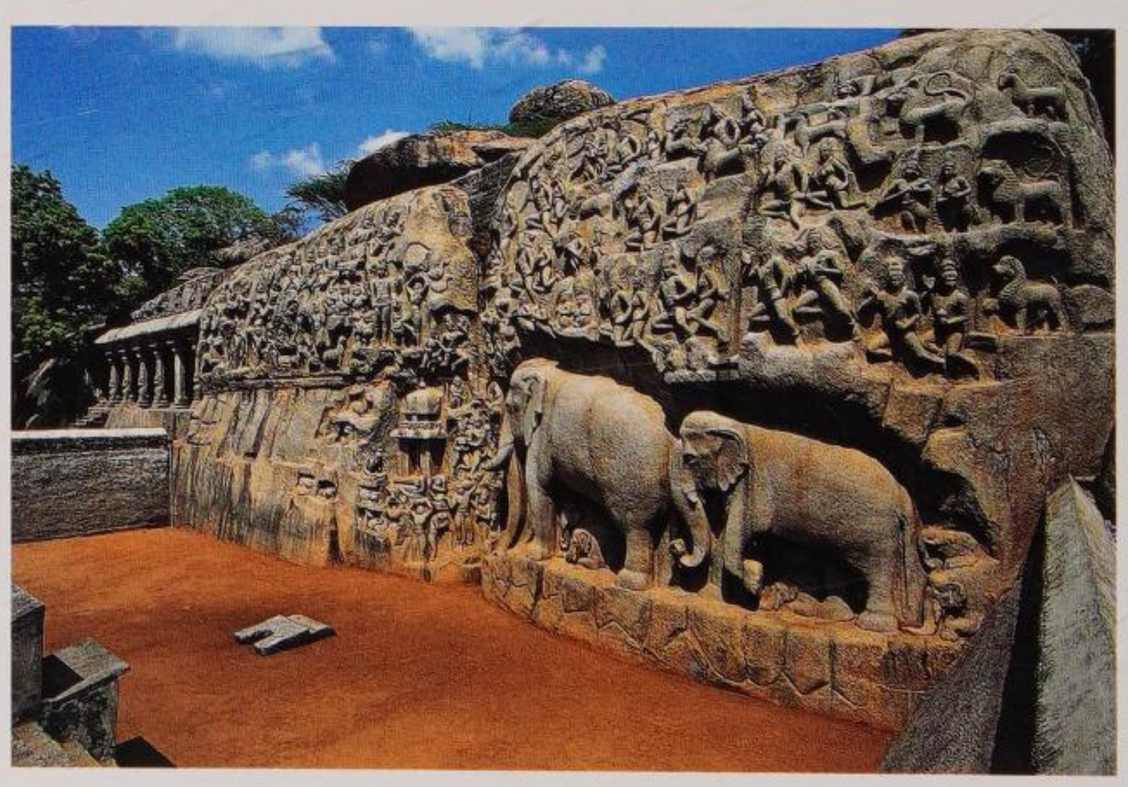




The great relief known as the *Penance of Arjuna* or the *Descent of the Ganges* is also attributed to Narasimhavarman's reign. This enormous work covers the entire surface of two rocks in the center of the village. Much controversy surrounds its subject, with some scholars claiming that it depicts the descent from heaven of the Ganges, while others believe that it illustrates a famous episode from the *Mahabharata* about Arjuna. Although the reference to the Ganges appears to be emphasized by the presence, in the middle of the relief, of a cleft along which a stream of water gushes, fed by a rainwater tank that was once situated on top of the rock, the Arjuna theory is supported by the presence of the story of the penance of Arjuna in the *Kiratarjuniya*, a work by the famous 6th-century Sanskrit poet Bharavi. In addition to the figures of Shiva and Vishnu, surrounded by hermits, ascetics and *ganas*, there is also a profusion of motifs: snake deities, *nagas* and *naginis*, Apsaras, Gandharvas and Kumaras, figures of hunters and animals, all represented realistically.

Mahabalipuram is also home to the splendid Shore Temple, dedicated to Shiva and built by Narasimhavarman II, known as Rajasimha (680-720). Situated on the seashore, this temple has three sanctums, one dedicated to Vishnu and the other two to Shiva, which not only house the *linga*, but also a relief depicting Shiva with Uma, his wife, and Skanda, his son. This was a very popular theme with Pallava artists and appears in many decorative schemes, including paintings, e.g., the splendid mural on the end wall of cell 41 of the courtyard of the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram.





176 TOP - THIS DETAIL OF THE HUGE RELIEF AT MAHABALIPURAM SHOWS AN ASCETIC STANDING ON ONE LEG WITH HIS ARMS RAISED, NEXT TO A MAJESTIC SHIVA WITH FOUR ARMS.

176 BOTTOM LEFT - THIS CAVE TEMPLE, WITH COLUMNS RESTING ON CROUCHING LIONS, IS SITUATED NEXT TO THE MAHABALIPURAM RELIEF.

176 BOTTOM RIGHT - THE RELIEF, KNOWN AS THE *DESCENT OF THE GANGES*, COVERS TWO HUGE BOULDERS SEPARATED BY A NARROW CLEFT AND DEPICTING HEAVENLY CREATURES, WILD ANIMALS AND SYLVAN SCENES.

177 - THIS DETAIL OF THE RELIEF SHOWS THE CLEFT IN THE ROCK, IN WHICH NAGAS AND NAGINIS ARE DEPICTED.

The latter has also been attributed to Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha and is a fine example of Pallava art. Dedicated to Shiva, the Lord of Kailasa, the temple is built from sandstone, except for a granite base, and represents the god's mythical mountain abode. It consists of a sanctuary and a separate hall, to which another larger one was added during the 16th century in order to connect the two structures. The complex is enclosed by rectangular walls that incorporate over 50 chapels decorated with familiar images of Shiva and lions, the dynasty's heraldic emblem. Traces of paintings can be seen in several cells of the temple's open courtyard. The best-preserved examples can be seen in cells 34 and 41, although the colors have almost completely faded. The Kailasanatha temple, along with the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, features the earliest examples of *gopurams*, the structures above the entrance gateways of southern Indian temples.

Pallava art can be divided into three periods corresponding to three different kings and three different styles. During the first of these, known as the Mahendra period, several temples were carved out of the rock. The second, Mamalla (i.e., Narasimhavarman) period, features both rock-cut temples and masonry ones.

During the third, Rajasimha period, temples were no longer cut out of the rock, and the style of the masonry shrines was refined: the columns, borne by lions, are slenderer, the niches are richly decorated and the figures are more exuberant. The central sanctum with its superstructure also acquired greater emphasis.

During the period of great turmoil that followed the peaceful reign of Rajasimha, Vikramaditya, the king of the Chalukyas, invaded and seized the Pallava rulers' capital city of Kanchipuram in 740.

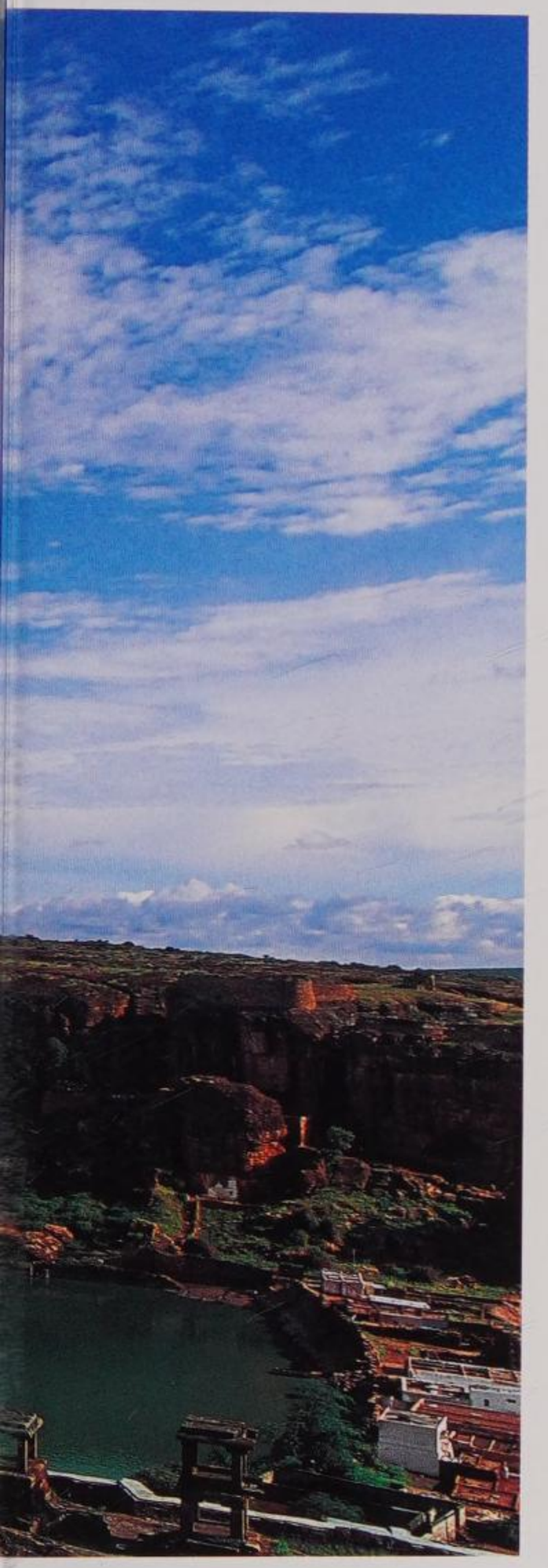
178 - The base of the pillars of the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, dating from the 8th century, is adorned with unusual rampant lions.

179 top - Sculptures of *yalis*, fantastic animals with the body of a lion, trunk of an elephant and horns of a goat, adorn the Kailasanatha temple.

179 bottom - The entrance of the Kailasanatha temple consists of a rectangular area with a barrel vault and is a prototype of the later *gopurams*.

The Vakatakas' successors in the Deccan were the Chalukyas, whose greatest king, Pulakeshin II, managed to repel Harshavardhana's attack. Following this victory, he was able to extend his realm eastward, where his brother Vishnuvardhana founded the Eastern Chalukya dynasty and ruled as an independent king. The politics of the Chalukya kings were characterized by their rivalry with the Pallavas, which had alternating fortunes. However, in terms of artistic traditions, Chalukya monuments imitated and gradually developed Vakataka art. The Chalukya rulers were generally great patrons of art and architecture and their sculptors were among the greatest and most original codifiers of Hindu iconography. Chalukya artists did not adopt either the northern (Nagara) style or the southern (Dravida) style exclusively in the construction of temples, but managed to use aspects of both, combining them with local and regional features.

From an artistic point of view, the Chalukya kingdom represents an eclectic repository of styles and experimentation. The kingdom's first capital was Aryapura (modern-day Aihole), which is also the site with the greatest number of



180-181 - The Upper Shivalaya temple, dating from the 7th or 8th century, stands on a base supported by an elephant and features a single-structure tiered roof.

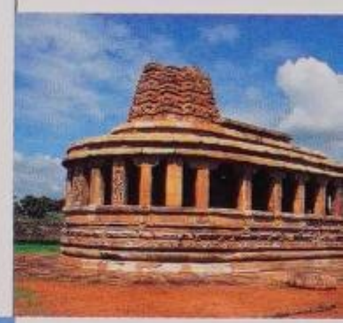
181 top - The Durga temple at Aihole stands on a base decorated with moldings topped by a frieze of dwarfs. The entablature above is also richly decorated.

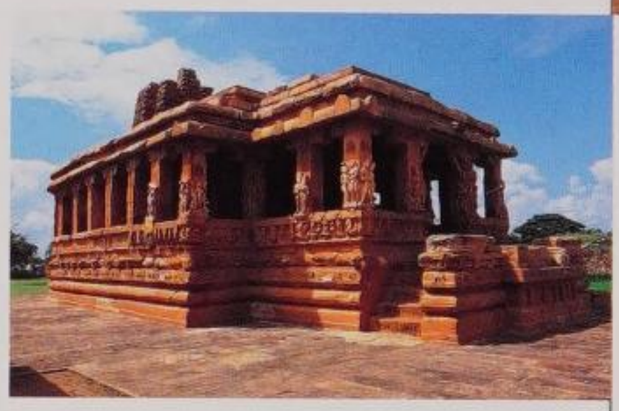
monuments of this dynasty. It is home to many temples, which include some of the oldest examples of Hindu sacred art, notably the famous and highly original Lad Khan and Durga temples. The former, dating from around the 6th-7th century, is one of Aihole's most interesting monuments, for it was inspired not by the traditions of religious architecture, but by the form of a village assembly hall. Like all early Chalukya temples, its structure is fairly simple and heavy, with a square base, thick walls lightened by windows with lattice-work, a flat roof and a porch supported by 12 heavy columns arranged in 3 rows of 4 columns each. The central columns of the outermost row are decorated with *mithunas* (amorous couples) and the side ones with figures of the goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. The Durga Temple dates from the same period, but consists of an apsidal structure, whose large inner hall is divided into three areas by two rows of four columns. The temple stands on a fairly high basement with extensive molding, topped by a long frieze depicting several dwarfs. The entablature above also features carved figures and the flat slabs of the roof rise over the sanctum to form a small *shikhara*, which would originally have been topped with an *amalaka*, in the style of the temples of northern India. The temple boasts one of the finest depictions of Durga, depicted slaying the buffalo-demon.

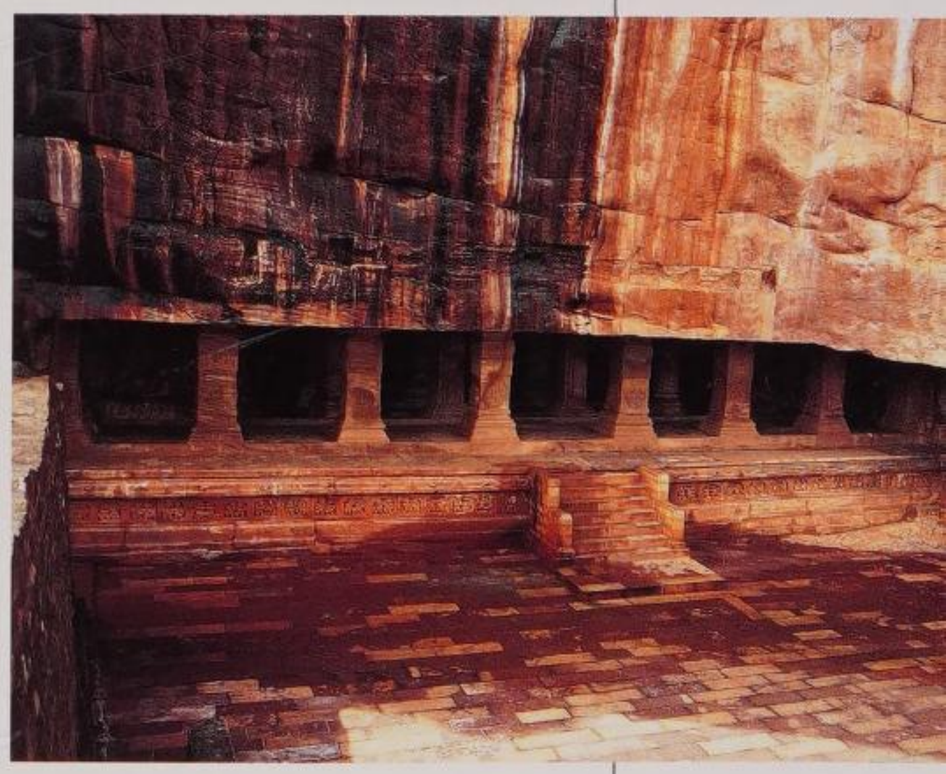
Pulakeshin I transferred the capital from Aihole to Vatapi, modern-day Badami, which reached its height during the reign of Pulakeshin II (610-642). Badami stands on the shore of an artificial lake, Bhutanatha, named after Shiva, Lord of the *Bhutas* (specters), and is protected by the mighty embrace of a horseshoe-shaped cliff. Four cave temples were carved out of the sides of the South Fort, the first three in the 6th century, and the fourth in the 7th century. The first cave is dedicated to Shiva, the second and the third to Vishnu, while the fourth is Jain. Cave 3 is the most important of the group and its entrance is formed by a long veranda with 6 columns and 2 side pillars topped with splendid capitals with dosserets adorned with figures of lions supported by dwarfs. Inside, the sculptures depicting Vishnu in various episodes of his mythology are all monumental and imposing, while the ceilings, which are particularly beautiful features of Chalukya art, are decorated with figures of deities, Gandharvas, nagas and other heavenly beings. Three temples stand on the North Fort. The most important of these is the Malegitti Shivalaya, the temple dedicated to Shiva the garland-maker, which represents a typical example of the Dravida style. Badami is also home to the

181 top center - The Durga temple at Aihole is preceded by a porch with 12 columns, accessed by two flights of steps at the sides.

181 bottom center - The Jaina Cave 3 at Badami has a long veranda with six columns and two pillars. The dosserets are decorated with figures of rampant lions supported by dwarfs.







181 bottom - This detail shows the decorative *kudu* arch motifs, which generally adorn the upper level of the base and the edge of the roof.

182 top left - This Pattadakal relief represents several episodes from the *Ramayana* epic.

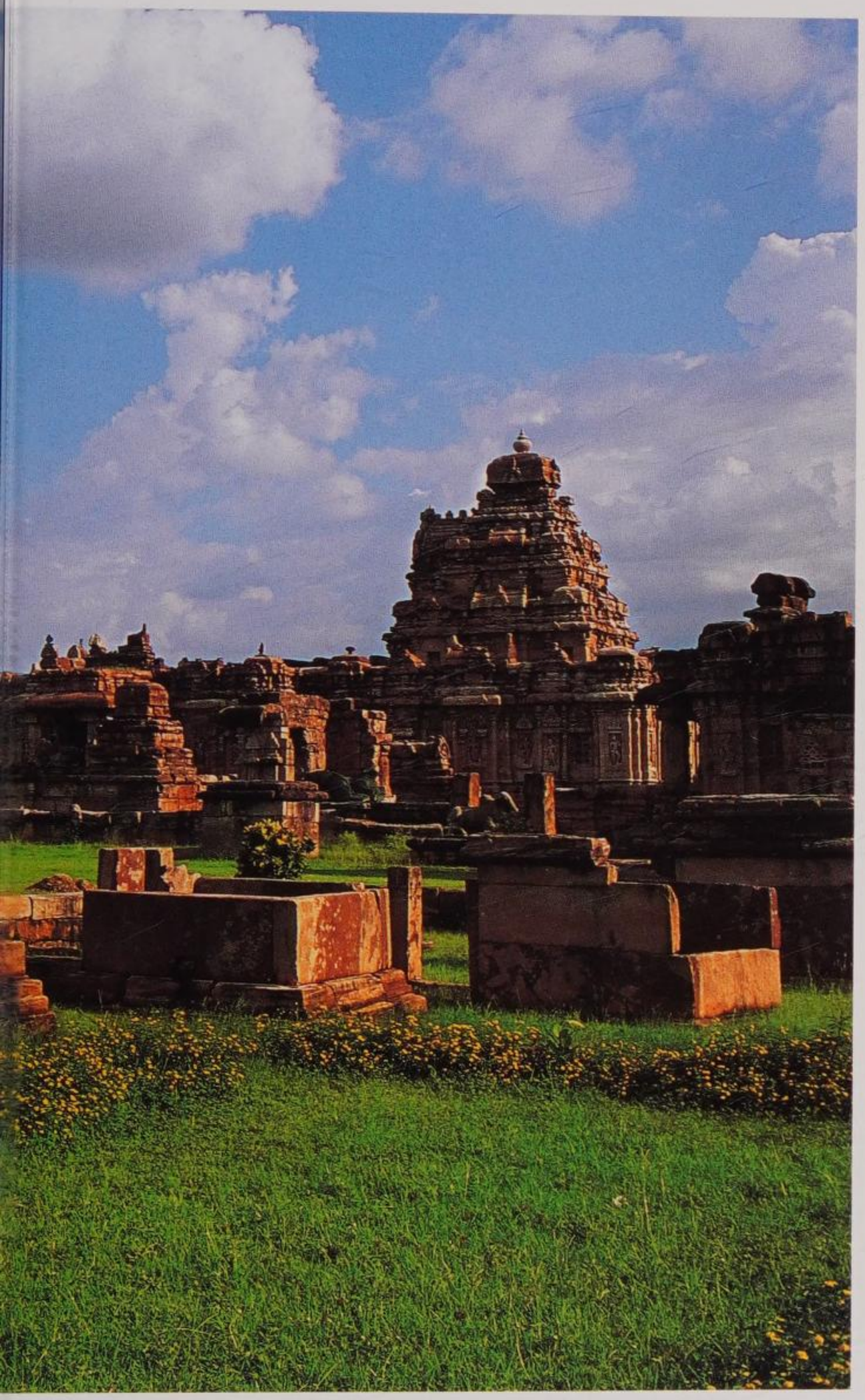
182 bottom left - The Kashi Vishveshwara temple at Pattadakal is topped by a northern-style shikhara.

182-183 - Many of the Pattadakal temples illustrate the encounter of Pallava and Chalukya art.

183 - The Papanatha temple was built in the northern style at the end of the 7th century and boasts a handsome relief.

Jambulinga temple, dedicated at the end of the 7th century to the *Trimurti*, the triad of the three great gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The building is probably one of the earliest examples of a *trikuta* temple, with a triple shrine, characterized by a sanctum situated in each of the three sides.

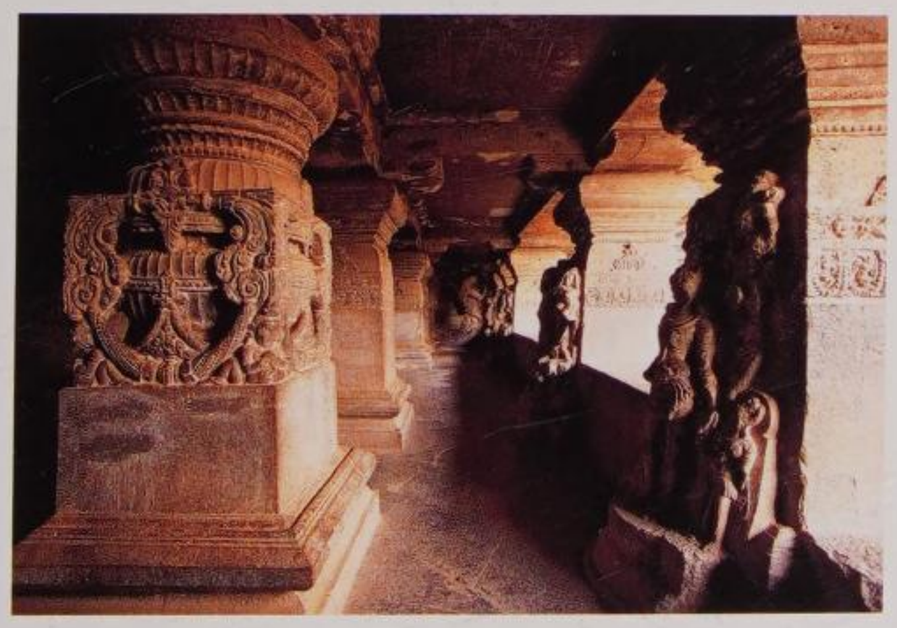
Following the Pallava occupation of Badami in 642, King Vikramaditya I (655-681) chose Pattadakal as his capital. However, under Vikramaditya II (733-744), the Chalukyas seized the



Pallava capital, Kanchipuram, in 740. The incessant hostilities between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas that resulted in the alternating political supremacy of the two dynasties had positive artistic effects, aiding the fusion of the two styles, as demonstrated by many of Pattadakal's temples. The Virupaksha temple, dating from the middle of the 8th century, was built with the intention of commemorating Vikramaditya II's conquest of Kanchipuram. It is the most sumptuous temple in Pattadakal, in which the Dravida style reaches exceptional heights of inspiration. Externally, the complex consists of an enclosure, a chapel housing the bull Nandi, the hall and the cella. The latter is preceded by a vestibule with two side chapels and a roof featuring three courses with terraces edged with miniature pavilions and topped by a square cupola culminating in a pinnacle in the form of a water-pot. The interior is richly decorated and the columns of the *mandapa* are adorned with numerous scenes from the great epics, particularly from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The sides of the entrance to the shrine are guarded by *dvarapala* figures, which are recurrent features in the temples of southern India. The Papanatha temple, not far from the Virupaksha, was built around the end of the 7th or beginning of the 8th century, in Nagara style, although the grooved *amalaka* that crowned it has not survived. Several inscriptions commemorate the sculptors Baladeva and Changamha, a recognition that is very rare in the Indian tradition. The outer walls of this temple represent a detailed saga of the *Ramayana* in the form of countless panels, each accompanied by a short inscription describing the scene represented. Alampur has a group of nine temples dating from the same period as those of Pattadakal, which they closely resemble. As at Pattadakal, there are temples with *shikharas* terminating in an *amalaka* according to the northern style, and others with octagonal superstructures, like the Virupaksha temple, according to the southern style. The Alampur

temples are constituted by a cella with a wide ambulatory and vestibule included in the hypostyle *mandapa*, sometimes preceded by an entrance porch. The ceilings are richly decorated, while the niches feature handsome *makara-toranas* (portals decorated with an element constituted by a central mask from which water creatures spring) housing several figures of deities. The *makara-torana* motif, typical of southern India, was subsequently widely adopted in Southeast Asia.

In about the mid-8th century the Chalukyas were defeated and replaced by the Rastrakutas, their former feudatories. The first Rastrakuta king, Dantidurga, seized power in 752 and established his capital at Ellora. His successor was his uncle, Krishna I (756-775), who built the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, the masterpiece of Indian medieval art. This extraordinary stone imitation of Mount Kailasa, the holy mountain and abode of the god Shiva, is the highest expression of the excellence of Indian sculptural art, inspired by the purest devotion. The temple is situated in the center of a great courtyard, cut out of the side of the mountain, onto which porches and halls open. The grandeur of this temple is even more breathtaking if one considers that the architecture is carved, rather than assembled. The overall height of the temple is about 100 ft (30.5 m) and the artists presumably worked from the top of the hill downward. The temple consists of a pavilion for Nandi, a pillared hall and a cella, surrounded by five chapels. The southern tradition is followed in the Kailasnatha temple and it seems likely that Pallava artists were involved in its construction. It is decorated with countless sculptures: from the basement adorned with majestic sculptures of elephants, which gives the illusion of supporting the structure, the entire temple is covered with decorations and sculptural groups. The dominant theme consists of images from the mythological cycle of Shiva, although there are also smaller panels recounting episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The technical perfection and refined taste of the Rastrakuta sculptors can be admired in various works, including the numerous reliefs of heavenly beings captured in faces on the outer wall of the main shrine, Shiva Yogeshvara, reminiscent of his Vakataka equivalent in the Elephanta Caves, the two figures of Mahisamardini and the panel depicting Ravana offering his severed heads to Shiva, as though they were a garland.



184 - The Kailasanatha temple at Ellora has 52 ft (16 m) high square pinnacles, decorated with fine reliefs, which stand either side of the main sanctuary.

185 top - This relief from the Kailasanatha temple depicts an armed *dvarapala* that guards the entrances.

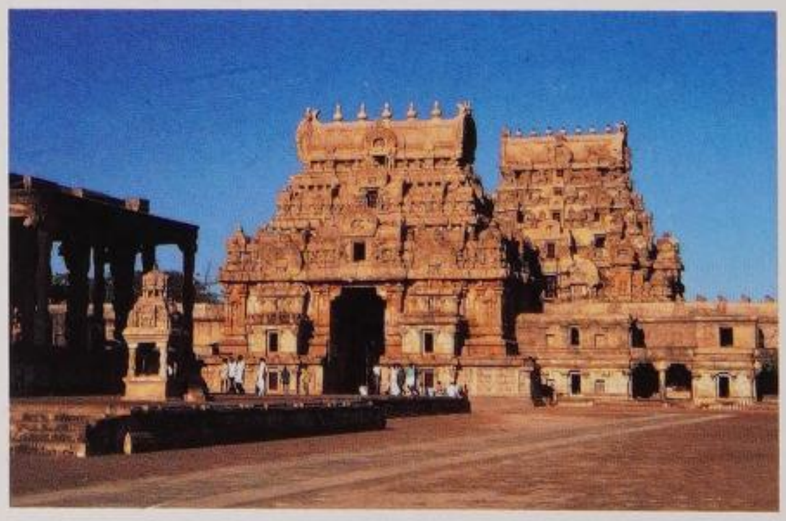
185 bottom left - The columns and pillars play a purely aesthetic role in the Kailasanatha temple.

185 bottom right - This pavilion imitates the shrines of medieval Indian architecture.

The continuous warring with the Rastrakutas led to the decline of the powerful Pallava dynasty, and the Cholas, their main feudatories reasserted their independence in 897 under King Aditya, who established his capital in Tanjore. The Cholas boasted a glorious past connected with King Karikala of Urayur, the first Chola ruler, who defeated a coalition formed by the Pandyas and the Cheras in AD 190. Together with his son Parantaka (907-955), Aditya strengthened Chola power in the south, although it was not until the end of the 10th century that the dynasty managed to expand its territory under Uttama Chola and his son Rajaraja I. Rajaraja I conquered the area now known as Kerala, along with Sri Lanka, and even the Maldives. He ordered the construction of the monumental Brihadishvara temple, also known as the Rajarajeshvara, meaning the Lord of Rajaraja, Shiva. This colossal temple belongs to the middle period of Chola architecture, which followed the early period represented by several very simple temples built by kings Aditya and Parantaka, including the emblematic temple of Vijayalaya Cholisvara at Narttamalai. The latter temple is built entirely from stone and is composed of four stories, of which the first three are square and the top one circular. The entrance of the *mandapa* is decorated with fine floral motifs and is guarded by two *dvarapala* figures with a single pair of arms.

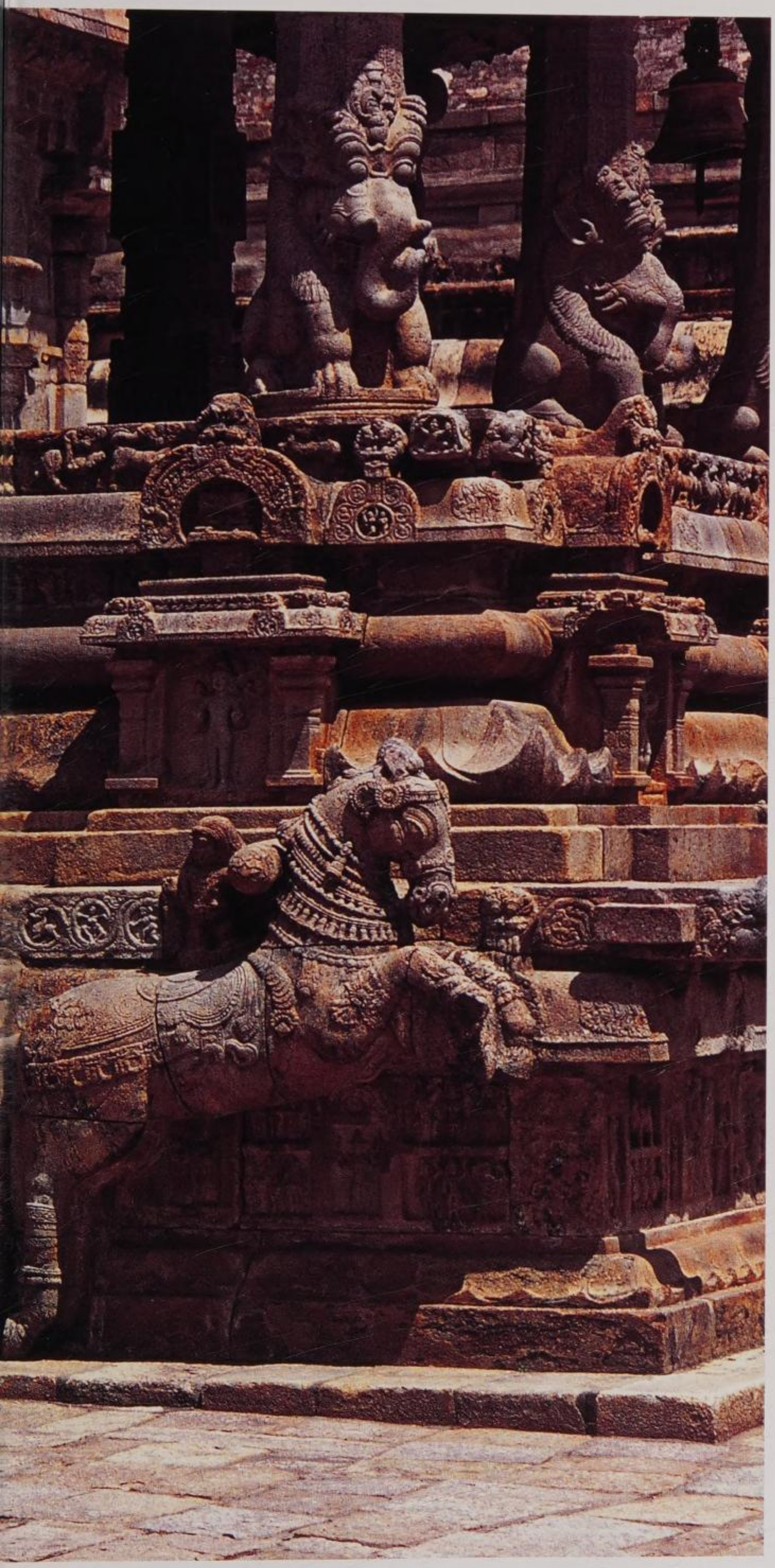
The Brihadishvara temple is the most imposing Chola monument. It is built from huge blocks of granite and consists of a *vimana,* central sanctuary and its superstructure, rising to a height of over 190 ft (623 m). The niches that open on three of its sides, in two superimposed rows, contain various depictions of deities, such as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha and many others. At the entrance, on the eastern side, a flight of steps leads to a pillared hall with a *dvarapala* on each side and figures of warrior princes in niches, which represent the great military leaders who contributed to Rajaraja's victories. The *shikhara* is an octagonal monolithic block. The cella of the temple dedicated to Shiva houses such a tall *linga* that it required the construction of an upper gallery in order to allow the required rites of aspersion and floral offerings. The inner walls of this second gallery are carved with the 108 canonical positions of the sacred dance performed by Shiva. Much of the Brihadishvara temple's painted decoration has survived. Indeed, both the wall and the ceiling of the passage around the cella are covered with paintings, many of which are still hidden by a later layer of images. However, the northern and western walls are display the original paintings depicting Shiva in his various forms, as Dakshinamurti, Nataraja and Tripurantaka. Hundreds of Brahmans, dancers, musicians and servants lived in the temple, maintained by the income from its villages and the generous offers and donations made to the temple, which also operated as a bank and did not disdain the management of commercial enterprises.

Rajendra I inherited his father's military and organizational skills and his artistic spirit, which he combined with an unparalleled military genius. He continued his father's expansionist policy and between 1022 and 1023 led a glorious military campaign that took him as far as Bengal and modern-day Varanasi. To celebrate his victory over Mahipala, the Pala king of eastern India, Rajendra I erected a *jayastambha* (pillar of victory) in the new capital Gangaikondacholapuram ("the City of the Chola who took the Ganges"), whose name was derived from a great irrigation tank, now ruined, which collected the waters of the Ganges, the sole tribute that the Chola king requested from his feudatories. Rajendra I also attacked and defeated the king of Sumatra and Java and the power of his fleet is demonstrated by his brilliant conquests of Burma, the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, Sri Lanka and the Laccadive Islands. He was a great lover of the arts, particularly literature, and took the title of *Panditachola*, the "Learned Chola." He built a temple modeled on the Brihadishvara in Gangaikondacholapuram. This temple is 180 ft (55 m) tall and composed of a cella, housing a 13 ft (4 m) *linga*, an ambulatory, a connecting vestibule and a *mahamandapa*.



186 - The two *gopurams* of the Brihadishvara temple at Tanjore were built at the beginning of the 11th century by the Chola ruler Rajaraja I and are 100 ft (30.5 m) high.

187 - The granite Brihadishvara temple at Tanjore has a 150-square-foot central sanctum and a *shikhara* almost 200 ft (61 m) tall.



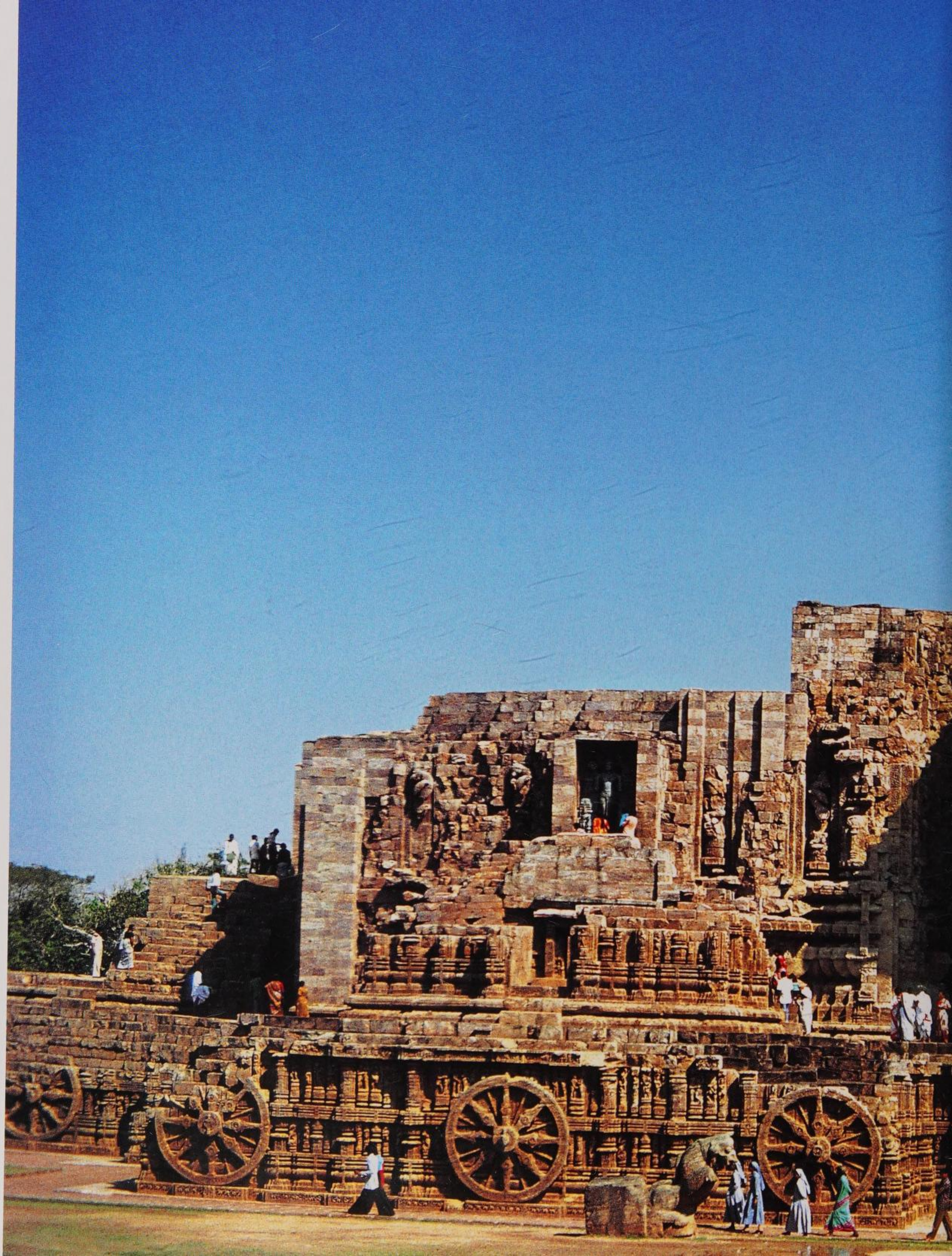
The Darasuram temple, built during the 12th century by Rajaraja II, continues and enriches the great Chola architectural tradition, which appears to have produced around 100 temples, the majority of which were dedicated to Shiva. The Chidambaram temple, which stands on the site where Shiva performed his cosmic dance, is a huge complex – almost a divine city – featuring a great water tank known as the Shivaganga. The origins of the cult of Shiva Nataraja in Chidambaram appear to be associated with the worship of a stone, which was subsequently identified as a *Shiva linga*, in a pond that later became the Shivaganga. The tank is oriented to face the Thiravalur temple and is surrounded by flights of steps, small pillared halls and many sanctuaries to aid bathing and ablutions before entering the temple. Alongside the lake-sized tank stands the Rajasabha, a *mandapa* supported by 1000 pillars, each different from the next and dating from different periods.

The temple of Shiva Nataraja, the Chola dynasty's favorite god, consists of two similar structures, the first of which is dedicated to the visible form of Shiva and houses a statue cast from five metals, the effigy of his consort, an emerald *murti* of Shiva, and a crystal *linga*, while the second houses the non-manifest form of the god, symbolized by the invisible *Akasha linga*. The figures in the niches of the *gopurams* are not particularly interesting in terms of iconography, but constitute the finest examples of 12th-13th-century sculpture. Chidambaram also features numerous depictions of dance scenes, which are not only of artistic interest, but also represent a visual compendium of the 108 *karanas* (dance units) described by Bharata in the *Natya Shastra*. The wheel is a recurrent motif at both Chidambaram and Darasuram and also inspired the famous chariot-shaped temple of Konarak, dedicated to the sun god Surya. It was built by Narasimha, the descendent of a Chola princess who had married an eastern Ganga prince who introduced the motifs of Chola art to her realm, corresponding to the modern-day state of Orissa.

188-189 - The structure of the Darasuram temple is based on the model of the processional chariot.

189 - Traces of painted decoration have survived at the Darasuram temple.

190-191 - An imposing pyramid with three tiers of *pidhas* tops the huge assembly hall of the Surya temple at Kornak, built in the form of a processional chariot.



Chola artists were not only tireless builders of temples, but also particularly skilled in the production of bronze statues. The Chola bronzes have their illustrious antecedents in the Pallava period, during which the lost-wax process was perfected. A figure was fashioned from wax and resin and subsequently covered in clay. The wax was then melted and drained off through small tubes, thus creating a mold into which the metal was poured. The earliest Chola bronzes date to a period between the Pallava production and that corresponding to the rules of Rajaraha and Rajendra. They combine highly skilled craftsmanship with attractive artistic expression and large dimensions. The early Chola bronzes included the famous *Nataraja* from Tiruvalangadu.

192 - This Chola bronze depicts the southern image of Shiva: Dakshinamurti, a benevolent form of the god, who is the supreme yogin and master of entire knowledge, music and the Vedas (Musée Guimet, Paris).

193 - This detail of Shiva's face is part of the broader iconography of Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Dance. A ring of fire surrounds the dancing figure with the imperturbable smile, whose hair flies out to the sides, like wings (British Museum, London).

194-195 - Somaskandamurti, depicted in this Chola bronze figure, is a form of Shiva represented with his divine consort Parvati and his son Skanda. This type of representation is found only in southern India (Musée Guimet, Paris).

196 and 197 - This Chola bronze depicts the god Krishna, the complete incarnation of Vishnu, as he dances. The mythology and consequent iconography of Krishna is rich and varied, comprising the various stages of the god's childhood, youth and adulthood (Musée Guimet, Paris).

Orissa is probably the region of eastern India that produced the most interesting artistic output during the Middle Ages. During the 7th century, following the decline of the Gupta empire, the Sailodbhava dynasty emerged to rule an area corresponding to the southern part of Orissa. Subsequently, in the 8th century, the Sailodbhavas were driven out by the Bhaumakaras, who were in turn replaced by the Somavamsi kings of western Orissa during the 10th century. Finally, during the 12th century, a Ganga ruler conquered the regional kingdom of Orissa and annexed it to his own land, in modern-day Andhra Pradesh.

From the early Middle Ages the architectural development of Orissan temples focused principally on the sanctuary, known locally as the *deul*, and the porch (*jagamohana*), which was generally square. The sanctuary is not very imposing in its earliest form, but started to become more so around AD 1000, until acquiring a towering appearance. The principal kind of temple is of the Rekha type, tall and imposing with a square cella, a curved roof surmounted by an *amalaka* known as a *beka*, that is capped by a *kalasha* ("water-pot") finial. In the later temples the symbol of the deity is generally positioned on top of the *kalasha*. The other type of temple, which is preferred for temples dedicated to Shakti, features a rectangular cella with a beehive-shaped tower. The typical Orissan sanctuary has a single central vertical projection, while the rest of the wall is indented, or alternatively three, five or seven projections that, together with the corresponding indentations, form the *triatha*, *pancaratha* or *saptaratha* respectively. A series of miniature sanctuaries are situated above the main wall of the sanctuary, each with its own *amalaka*. The characteristic bell-shaped crowning element of the *jagamohana* is known as a *ghanta kalasha*. In addition to a cella and a hall where the devotees assemble, joined by a vestibule known as an *antarala*, the more important temples also feature a dance pavilion (*natamandira*) and an offering hall (*bhogamandapa*). The beauty of these temples is heightened by the exquisite decorative friezes that run along their bases and their numerous latticed windows. The site of Bhubaneshwar allows us to trace the development of the architectural tradition of the region from the end of the 6th century until the 13th century. Most of the temples built here are dedicated to Shiva, with the sole exception of the Ananta Vasudeva temple (one of the later ones) dedicated to Vishnu. The famous and very impressive Lingaraja temple is richly decorated with monumental sculpture. It was built between 1000 and 1040 and is still an important place of worship today. The temple stands in a huge enclosure measuring 500 x 450 ft (152 x 137 m) and is surrounded by 80 minor temples.

The Rajarani temple, dating from the first half of the 11th century, constitutes a unique experiment at Bhubaneshwar: its seven-story *shikhara* is surrounded by numerous copies of various sizes that give it a cluster appearance. The Rajarani temple also contains some of the finest sculpture from this period, while the Vaital Deul, one of the oldest temples at Bhubaneshwar, dating from around the mid-8th century, has an unusual sort of barrel-vaulted roof.

The city of Puri, one of the most sacred Hindu centers, is home to the Jagannatha temple, commenced in 1136 and dedicated to the god Vishnu as Lord of the World. The main chapel houses three wooden statues of Jagannatha, his brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra, which are drawn through the streets of the city on a chariot pulled by devotees in a great procession during the month of *ashadha* (June-July) on the occasion of the Ratha Yatra festival.

198 - The grandest temple of Bhubaneshwar is that of Lingaraja (around AD 1000) and is considered the greatest in Orissa.

199 - The Rajarani temple differs from the other Orissan sanctuaries and its miniature *shikharas* one make it more similar to the Khajuraho temples.

Konarak temple can be considered the crowing achievement of Orissan temple architecture. It was built in the 13th century by Narasimha I (1238-1264), a descendent of the Chola princess Rajasundari, and assimilates the *ratha* motive of the Chola temples of Darasuram and Chidambaram and elaborates that of the horse and wheel, transforming the *vimana* (temple and its superstructure) into a stone chariot of the sun god Surya. The chariot is drawn by 7 horses unrivaled in terms of both their refined craftsmanship and their sheer size, and has 27 wheels, each 10 ft (3 m) in diameter, which symbolize either the 2 fortnights of each of the 12 months of the year or the 12 months of the year in their diurnal and nocturnal forms. The rich and elaborate decoration of the Konarak temple includes figures of dancers, which are particularly important as they have allowed the reconstruction of the positions of the local classical dance.

200 TOP - TWO MONUMENTAL LIONS RESTING ON THE BODY OF AN ELEPHANT CRUSHING A DEMON STAND AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE *NATAMANDIRA*.

200 BOTTOM - THE REMAINS OF THE KONARAK TEMPLE COMPRISE THE IMPOSING AUDIENCE HALL (*JAGAMOHANA*), THE RUINS OF THE TOWERS, THE DANCE PAVILION (*NATAMANDIRA*) AND THE SECONDARY TEMPLES.

201 AND 202-203
THE KONARAK SCULPTORS HAD A VERY WIDE REPERTORY OF THEMES, INCLUDING FIGURES OF DEITIES, HEAVENLY SPIRITS, BIRDS AND REAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL ANIMALS.

INDEX

c = caption

A
Abaneri, 154
Acchutavikkanta, 173
Adinatha, 162
Aditya, 186
Afghanistan, 12, 28, 99c, 100, 103c
Agni Purana, 129
Agni, 50, 50c, 135
Ahicchatra, 116
Aihole, 180c, 181
Airavateshvara, 189c
Ajanta, 16c, 17, 91, 91c, 93c, 118c, 119, 120, 120c, 122c, 123, 123c, 124
Ajatashatru, 49
Ajivika, 81
Alamgirpur, 28
Alampur, 183
Alexander the Great, 66, 81, 100
Allahabad, 108
Amaravati, 17, 49c, 54c, 57c, 85, 86c, 88, 88c
Amba, 139
Ambika, 154
Amri, 26
Ananta Vasudeva, 199
Ananta, 115c
Anantashayin, 115c
Andhaka, 112
Andhra Pradesh, 199
Andhra, 82, 84, 85
Anga, 48, 49
Apasmara Purusha, 132
Apollodorus, 94
Arabs, 154
Aranyakas, 43
Archaeological Museum, Harappa, 27c, 39c
Archeological Museum, Halebid, 138c
Archeological Museum, Sarnath, 81c, 116c, 135c
Ardhanarishvara, 130
Arjuna, 146c, 147, 174, 176
Arthashastra, 66
Aruna, 160c
Aryans, 12, 17, 29c, 36, 42, 43, 44, 52
Aryapura, 181
Ashoka, 17, 66, 68, 70, 73c, 81, 81c, 82, 108
Asia, 17, 49, 94, 103c, 108
Atharva Veda, 43
Aurangabad, 124, 124c, 125c
Avalokiteshvara, 108c, 124c, 125c
Avanti, 48, 49
Ayodhya, 142, 143
Azes I, 94, 95c

B
Bactria, 94
Badami, 151, 174, 180c, 182
Bagh, 119
Baladeva, 183
Balarama, 199
Baluchistan, 66
Bamiyan, 102, 103c
Bana, 151
Banerji, R.D., 28
Bangladesh, 12
Barabar, 81
Bedsa, 84
Begram, 99c
Bengal, 48, 151
Besarh, 60
Bhagavad Gita, 147
Bhairava, 112, 130
Bhairavi, 139
Bhaja, 84, 85, 85c, 88
Bhanugupta, 126
Bharat Kala Bhavan, 98
Bharat, 12, 43
Bharata, 12, 43, 147, 189
Bharavi, 176
Bharhut, 82, 83, 83c 88, 98, 100
Bhaumakaras, 199
Bhikshatana, 130
Bhima I, 162, 162c
Bhima, 174
Bhimbetka, 26, 27c
Bhoja, 167
Bhojpur, 167
Bhojsala, 167
Bhopal, 26
Bhubaneshwar, 17, 91, 91c, 199, 199c
Bhutesar, 98
Bhuteshvara, 130
Bihar, 54, 60, 81, 108, 151
Bikaner, 28
Bimbisara, 49
Bindusara, 66
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 116
Black Sea, 17, 42
Bodh Gaya, 54, 83
Bodhi, 57c
Bolan Pass, 26
Brahma, 42c, 112, 129, 129c, 130, 141, 141c
Brahmanas, 43
Brahmanism, 54
Brihadishvara, 186c
Brihadratha, 81
British Museum, London, 10c, 45c, 49c, 54c, 57c, 61c, 63c, 66c, 69c, 86c, 88c, 95c, 103c, 105c, 109c, 116c, 129c, 131c, 133c, 135c, 136c, 142c, 151c, 160c, 192c
Buddha, 12c, 31, 49c, 54, 54c, 57c, 60, 68, 68c, 70, 73c, 77c, 82, 85, 88, 91c, 93c, 95c, 98, 102, 103c, 105, 105c, 108c, 116, 116c, 118c, 119, 120, 120c, 122c, 123, 123c, 124, 125c, 136, 153c, 173c
Buddhism, 12, 17, 49, 54, 60, 68, 70, 81, 109, 126, 151
Budhagupta, 126
Bulandibagh, 66
Bundelkhand, 154

C
Cambodia, 91
Camunda, 139
Canakya, 66
Candella, 154, 166
Candi, 139
Caspian Sea, 17, 42
Caucasus, 17, 42
Chalukya, 151, 174, 179, 181, 182, 185
Chandra Yakshi, 82
Chandragupta, 17, 66, 108, 111, 126
Chandraketugarh, 83c
Changamha, 183
Chaturbhuj, 167c
Chedi, 82, 91
Chera, 173, 186
Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalay, Mumbai, 29c
Chidambaram, 189, 200
China, 151c
Cholas, 173, 186
Cunningham, Sir Alexander, 28

D
Daksha, 135
Dakshinamurti, 130, 192c
Dantidurga, 185
Darasuram, 45c, 189, 189c, 200
Dasharatha, 143
Dashavatara, 115, 115c, 126
Deccan, 12, 82, 151, 166, 173, 181
Delhi, 12, 147, 151
Demetrius, 94
Deogarh, 115, 115c
Devabhuti, 82
Dhanga, 166, 167c
Dhara, 167
Dharmaraja, 174
Dhu Marlena, 126
Didarganj, 81
Dilwara, 162
Doab, 43
Draupadi, 174
Duladeo, 168c
Durga, 111c, 139, 154, 159c, 174, 180c, 181

E
Egypt, 32
Elephant Cave, see Hathi Gumpha
Elephanta, 112, 113c, 124, 130, 185
Ellora, 124, 126, 126c, 185, 185c
Enlightened One, 93c, 116c, 122c
Eran, 17, 108, 126
Eucratides, 94
Europe, 28

F
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 42c

G
Ganapati, 132
Gandak, 49
Gandhara, 69c, 95c, 99c, 100, 102, 103c, 105, 105c
Ganesh's Cave, see Ganesha Gumpha
Ganesha Gumpha, 91
Ganesha, 12c, 111c, 112, 132, 133c, 135, 146c
Ganga, 111, 112, 115, 126, 132, 135, 181, 189, 199
Ganges, 48, 49, 60, 136, 154, 176
Gaspar, 94
Gauri, 139
Ghaggar, 28
Gondophares, 94
Govardhana, 174c
Government Museum, Chennai, 49c, 173c
Government Museum, Mathura, 16c, 94c
Great Bath, 34, 35c
Great Cosmic Man (Buddha), 98
Great Goddess, 135, 139
Gujarat, 28, 60, 94, 108, 154, 162, 166
Gundaphorus, 94
Gupta Empire, 17, 109, 111c, 151
Gurjara-Pratihara, 151, 154, 156c, 166

H
Hadrian, 151
Hanuman, 142c, 143
Harappa, 17, 27c, 28, 29c, 34, 34c, 35c, 36, 36c, 39c, 42, 100
Harihara, 130, 154, 154c, 160c
Harsat-Mata, 154
Harshacarita, 151
Harshavardhana, 17, 151, 180
Hathi Gumpha, 91
Hephthalites, 126
Himalayas, 12, 112, 135, 151
Himavat, 112, 135
Hinayana Buddhism, 54
Hinduism, 12, 109, 126, 151
History of Buddhism, 68
Hittites, 42
Huns, 167

I
India Office Library, London, 42c
India, 12, 14c, 17, 26, 28, 29c, 39c, 43, 46, 49, 50c, 66, 70, 83, 84, 85, 91, 94, 115, 126, 151, 151c, 167, 173, 179, 195c
Indian Archaeological Survey, 28
Indian Museum, Kolkata, 83c
Indian subcontinent, 12, 17, 28
Indo-Aryans, 28, 36
Indo-Greeks, 17
Indonesia, 91
Indra, 42, 50, 85, 159c, 174c, 189c

Indus Valley Civilization, 12, 17, 26, 28, 29, 29c, 30, 30c, 32, 32c, 34, 36, 38c, 42, 130
Indus Valley, 26, 29c, 42
Indus, 12, 17, 26, 28, 36, 66, 94
Iran, 50c
Iranian plateau, 26

J
Jagannatha, 199
Jagat, 154, 159c
Jainism, 12, 17, 54, 60, 81, 109, 126
Jandial, 102
Jatakas, 91c
Jhangar culture, 17, 29
Jhukar culture, 17
Jodhpur, 154, 156c

K
Kabul Valley, 94
Kabul, 66
Kailasa, 112, 135, 179, 185
Kailasanatha, 126, 176, 179, 179c, 185, 185c
Kalabhras, 173
Kali, 138c, 139
Kalibangan, 27c, 28
Kalinga, 48, 49, 68, 82, 84, 91
Kalkin, 136
Kama, 132, 135
Kamasutra, 171
Kanauj, 151, 154
Kanchipuram, 173, 176, 179, 179c, 182, 183
Kandahar, 26
Kandariya Mahadeva, 10c, 166, 167c
Kanishka, 102
Kanva, 82, 83
Kapalika, 171
Karikala, 186
Karla, 84, 85
Karnataka, 91
Karttikeya, 135
Kashi, 48, 49
Kashmir, 100
Kathiawar, 94, 154
Kauravas, 146c, 147
Kautilya, 66
Kaveri, 173
Khajuraho, 10c, 17, 159c, 166, 167c, 171, 171c, 199c
Khandagiri, 91
Kharavela, 84, 91, 91c
Kilmavilangi, 173
Kiratarjuniya, 176
Kolkata, 83c
Konarak, 16c, 17, 50c, 151c, 189, 200, 200c
Kondane, 84
Kosala, 48, 49
Kot Diji, 26
Krishna I, 126, 185
Krishna, 115, 136, 138c, 139, 141, 146c, 147, 173, 174c, 197c
Kubera, 102
Kulli culture, 26
Kumaradevi, 108
Kumaragupta, 126
Kurma, 136
Kurukshetra, 147
Kushan, 17, 94, 95c, 98, 100, 102

L
Lahore, 28, 102
Lakshmana, 143, 166, 167c, 171c
Lakshmi, 109, 111, 139, 143
Lakulisha, 131c
Lalita, 139
Licchavi, 60, 108
Lingaraja, 199, 199c
Lokanatha, 153c
Lomas Rishi, 81, 81c
Lothal, 28
Luristan, 36

M
Madhya Pradesh, 26, 70, 82, 111c
Magadha, 17, 48, 49, 66, 81, 151
Mahabalipuram, 10c, 45c, 174, 174c, 176, 176c
Mahabharata, 111, 139, 142, 146c, 147, 174, 176, 183, 185
Mahajanaka Jataka, 118c
Mahakala, 130
Mahamalla, 174, 179
Mahapadma Nanda, 49
Mahavira, Jain temple (Osian), 154
Mahayana Buddhism, 12c, 54, 93c, 98
Mahayogin, 130
Mahendra, 179
Mahendravarman, 173
Maheshvara, 130
Mahipala, 154
Mahisamardini, 185
Maitreya, 100c, 173c
Malanda, 151
Malwa, 154, 166, 167
Mandagappattu, 173
Manjushri, 125c
Manu, 135c
Marshall, John, 28
Mathura, 94c, 95c, 98, 100, 105, 116
Matsya, 135c, 136
Maues, 94
Mauryan Empire, 17, 49, 66, 66c, 68, 70, 81, 82, 84, 102
Maya, 54c, 119
Mediterranean, 105
Megasthenes, 66
Mehrgarh, 26
Mena, 112, 135
Menander, 94
Mesopotamia, 32
Mihira Bhoja, 154
Mitanni, 42
Mitra, 42, 50
Modhera, 162, 162c
Mohenjo-daro, 17, 28, 30, 32, 32c, 34, 35c, 36, 36c, 38c, 39c, 42, 100
Mother-Goddess, 31, 31c
Mount Abu, 17, 162, 167
Mount Meru, 156c
Mudrarakashasa, 66
Muhammad of Ghur, 12
Mumbai, 112, 116
Musée Guimet, Paris, 50c, 61c, 83c, 88c, 99c, 100c, 108c, 131c, 136c, 138c, 151c, 153c, 173c, 192c, 195c, 197c
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 108c
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 10c
Museum of Indian Art, Berlin, 129c, 146c

N
Nagarjuni, 81
Nakula, 174
Nal culture, 26
Nalagiri, 49c
Nanda, 49, 66, 120
Nandin, 132, 135c, 183, 185
Narasimha I, 189, 200
Narasimha, 136
Narasimhavarman I, 174, 176
Narasimhavarman II, 176, 179
Narmada, 151
Nasatya, 42
Nasik, 84
Nataraja, 10c, 112, 130
National Museum of India, New Delhi, 12c, 27c, 29c, 30, 31c, 32c, 38c, 39c, 95c, 109c
National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi, 30c, 32c, 36c, 37c, 38c
Natya Shastra, 189
Nepal, 12
Nirvana, 54, 57c

O
Oriental Museum, University of Durham, 68c
Orissa, 48, 68, 151, 189, 199, 199c, 200
Osian, 154c, 156c

P
Padmapani, 118c, 119, 120c
Pakistan, 12
Pala, 151, 153c
Pallava, 171, 173c, 174c, 182, 186, 192
Panchatantra, 109
Pandavas, 146c, 147, 174
Pandyas, 173, 186
Papanatha, 182c
Paramara, 154, 166
Parashurama, 136
Paratanka, 186
Parel, 116
Parkham, 82
Parshvanatha, 168c
Parthians, 173
Parvati, 14c, 112, 126c, 132, 133c, 135, 135c, 139, 195c
Pashupata, 131c
Pashupati, 130
Pataliputra, 49, 66, 68, 94, 108
Patna Museum, 66c
Patna, 49, 54, 60
Pattadakal, 179, 182, 182c, 183
Peshawar, 102
Philadelphia Museum of Art, 138c
Pipla Devi, 154
Pleiades, 135
Prabhavati, 108, 109
Pravarasena II, 109
Prithviraj Chauhan, 12
Pulakeshin II, 151, 181
Punjab, 108, 151, 154
Puri, 199
Pushkar, 129
Pushyamitra Shunga, 81, 82, 94, 126

Q
Queen's Cave, see Rani Gumpha
Quetta, 26, 37c

R
Radha, 139
Rajaraja, 189, 192
Rajarani, 199, 199c
Rajasabha, 189
Rajasimha, 176, 179
Rajasthan, 28, 129, 151, 154, 166
Rajasundari, 200
Rama, 115, 136, 138c, 139, 142, 142c, 143
Ramachandra, 138c
Ramayana, 139, 142, 142c, 143, 147, 159c, 183, 185
Rameshvara, 126
Rani Gumpha, 91
Rastrakuta, 126, 154, 185, 186
Ratha Yatra, 199
Ravana ka Khai, 126
Ravana, 112, 142c, 143, 185
Renzo Freschi Oriental Art, Milan, 14c
Republic of India, 12, 43
Rig Veda, 29, 43, 44, 52, 136
Rudra, 130
Rudrasena II, 108, 109
Rupar, 28

S
Sadashiva, 112
Sahadeva, 174
Sailodbhavas, 199
Sakyamuni, 173c
Sama Veda, 43
Samudragupta, 17, 108
Sanatana Dharma, 12
Sanchi, 46c, 53c, 66c, 70, 70c, 73c, 77c, 78c, 79c, 82, 83, 84, 88, 98, 100, 111, 111c, 115, 115c, 116

Sannati, 91
Sarasvati, 17, 28, 29, 42, 109, 129, 129c
Sarkis Katchadourian, 16c
Sarnath capital, 81, 81c
Sarnath, 54, 116
Satakarni, 70
Satavahana Empire, 173
Satavahanas, 17, 70, 82, 83, 84, 88, 91, 108, 124
Sati, 135, 139
Satna, 82
Seleucids, 66
Seleucus I Nicator, 66, 100
Seleucus, 100
Shaka Empire, 94
Shakas, 17, 49, 54, 94, 108, 111
Shakti, 130, 199
Shami, 102
Shankara, 130
Shesha, 111c, 115, 115c, 129, 141, 141c
Shilpa-shastras, 14
Shishunaga, 49
Shiva Andhakasuravadhamurti, 112
Shiva Dakshinamurti, 116
Shiva Gangadhara, 112
Shiva Mahayogi, 132
Shiva Nataraja, 132, 189, 192c
Shiva Pashupati, 31, 31c
Shiva Yogeshvara, 112, 185
Shiva, 10c, 14c, 30, 31, 112, 113c, 116, 126c, 129, 129c, 130, 131c, 132, 133c, 135, 135c, 139, 141, 154, 160c, 166, 167, 173c, 176, 176c, 179, 185, 189, 189c, 192c, 195c, 199
Shivaganga, 189
Shivalinga, 189
Shore Temple, 176
Shri Lakshmi, 83, 98
Shri, 139
Shunga, 17, 70, 81, 83
Siddharta Gautama, 54, 54c
Simhavishnu, 173
Sind, 154
Sita, 136, 139, 142c, 143
Sivali, 118c
Skanda, 133c, 135, 176, 195c
Skandagupta, 126
Soan, 26
Solankis, 154, 162, 162c
Somaskandamurti, 195c
Somavamshi, 199
Sri Lanka, 12, 91, 142c, 143
Subhadra, 199
Surya, 12c, 16c, 50c, 83, 85, 151c, 154, 160c, 162, 189, 200

T
Tanjore, 186, 186c
Tara, 12c, 124
Tarain, 12
Taranatha, 68
Taxila, 94, 102
Teheran, 102
Thaneshwar, 151
Thiruvalur, 189
Thomas, 94
Tiruchchirappalli, 173
Tirukkalukunram, 173
Tiruvalangadu, 192
Toramana, 126

U
Udaipur, 154
Udayagiri, 91, 111, 111c
Ujjain, 48, 94
Uma, 139, 176
Universal Sovereign of the Spirit (Buddha), 98
Upanishads, 43
Upper Shivalaya, 180c
Urayur, 186
Ushas, 160c
Uttar Pradesh, 116

V
Vac, 50
Vaital Deul, 199
Vajrapani, 120c
Vakataka, 17, 108, 109, 112, 116, 119, 120, 124, 181
Valmiki, 142
Vamadeva, 112
Vamana, 136
Varaha, 111, 111c, 136
Varanasi, 48, 98
Vardhamana Mahavira, 54, 60
Varuna, 42, 50, 168c
Vasishta, 167
Vastupal, 162
Vasudeva, 82
Vatsa, 48
Vatsaraja, 151
Vayu, 142c
Vedas, 42, 42c, 50, 53, 129, 192c
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 68c
Vikramaditya I, 182, 182c
Vikramaditya II, 179, 182c, 183
Vindhya, 84
Viradhavala, 162
Virupaksha, 179, 183
Vishnu Narayana, 129
Vishnu, 10c, 111, 111c, 112, 115, 115c, 129, 129c, 130, 135c, 136, 136c, 138c, 139, 141, 141c, 142, 143, 154, 156c, 160c, 174c, 176, 197c, 199
Vishnuvardhana, 181
Vrijji, 49
Vrishni, 49
Vyasa, 142

W
Waghora, 119
White Huns, see Hephthalites

X
Xuanzang, 151, 151c

Y
Yajur Veda, 43
Yamuna, 111, 115, 126, 154, 181
Yashovarman I, 166, 167c

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Livio Bourbon/Archivio White Star: pages 13, 26-27, 27 top, center and bottom, 70, 86-87, 110-111, 110 bottom left, 111 top, center and bottom, 115 bottom right, 154 top, center and bottom, 154-155, 156 top and bottom, 157, 159 top and bottom, 180-181, 181 top, center and bottom, 182 top and bottom, 182-183, 183, 208
The Bridgeman Art Library/Archivio Alinari: pages 1, 26 left, 32 left, 34 bottom, 38 top right and left, 38 bottom right, 41, 43, 68 left, 140-141
The British Museum: pages 44, 57, 61, 66, 69 bottom, 87, 95 bottom, 105, 109 top and bottom, 133, 151 top, 193
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Bodhisattva head, 2nd century AD (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).
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Back cover
The monoliths at Mahabalipuram, 7th century AD.
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Maria Angelillo graduated in Modern Arts from Milan University in 2001, with a dissertation in the field of Indology, focused on the study of *mandalas* and *yantras*. The following year she was awarded the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient diploma in Hindi and in 2003 a certificate from the Landour Language School of Mussorie, Uttaranchal, India, after a period of study spent at the school. Since 2003 Angelillo has been an honorary fellow of Milan University's Faculty of Linguistic and Cultural Mediation. She taught Hindi as a contract lecturer at the Faculty of Diplomatic and International Science of Gorizia University and currently serves as a contract lecturer at Macerata University. In March 2006 she completed postgraduate studies in Anthropological and Ethnological Science at Milan-Bicocca University, with a dissertation on the identity of the so-called Indian gypsies, following a period of fieldwork in Rajasthan. Angelillo also collaborates with several yoga centers and cultural foundations for the study and diffusion of Indian culture.

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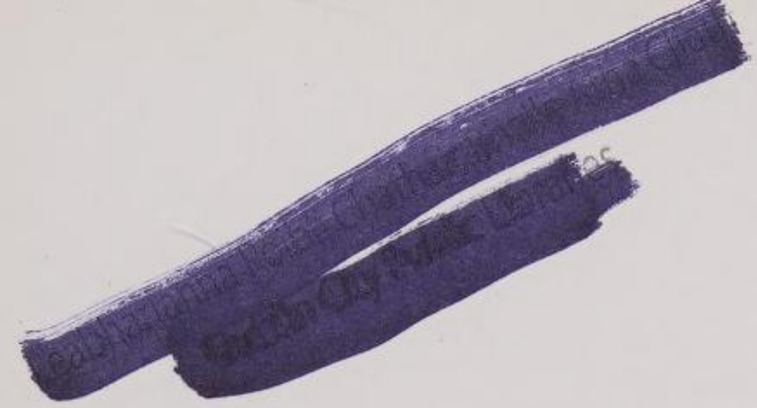

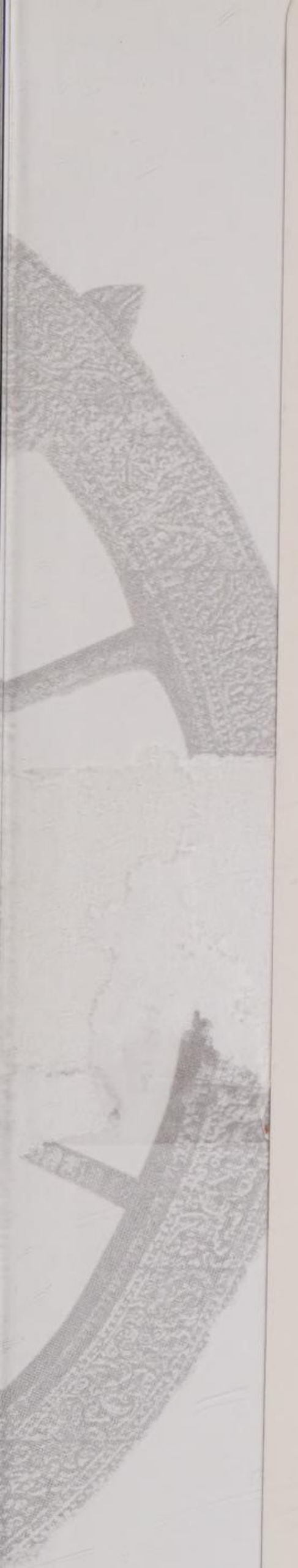

Maria Angelillo graduated in Modern Arts from Milan University in 2001, with a dissertation in the field of Indology, focused on the study of mandalas and yantras. The following year she was awarded the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient diploma in Hindi and in 2003 a certificate from the Landour Language School of Mussorie, Uttaranchal, India, after a period of study spent at the school. Since 2003 Angelillo has been an honorary fellow of Milan University's Faculty of Linguistic and Cultural Mediation. She taught Hindi as a contract lecturer at the Faculty of Diplomatic and International Science of Gorizia University and currently serves as a contract lecturer at Macerata University. In March 2006 she completed postgraduate studies in Anthropological and Ethnological Science at Milan-Bicocca University, with a dissertation on the identity of the so-called Indian gypsies, following a period of fieldwork in Rajasthan. Angelillo also collaborates with several yoga centers and cultural foundations for the study and diffusion of Indian culture.

FRONT:
Bodhisattva head, 2nd century AD (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).
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BACK:
The monoliths at Mahabalipuram, 7th century AD.
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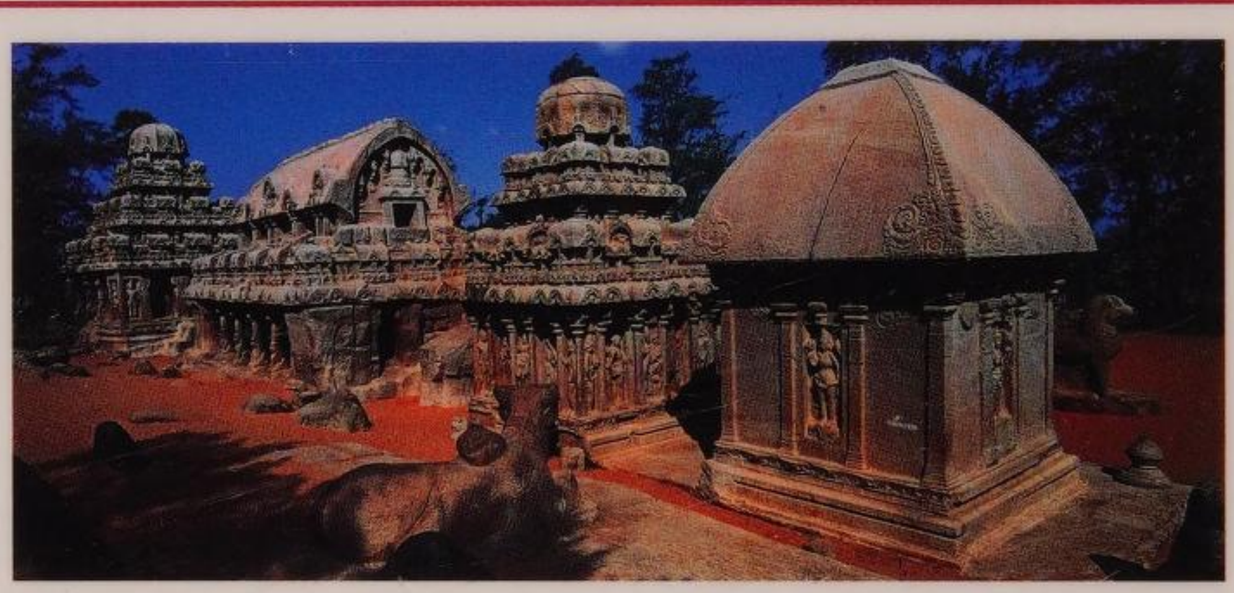
INDIA

HISTORY AND TREASURES OF AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION



FOR THE WEST, INDIA HAS LONG REPRESENTED A LAND OF MOTIONLESS SPIRITUALITY AND IMPENETRABLE MYSTICISM, AND WESTERNERS HAVE ONLY RECENTLY STARTED TO DISCOVER ITS GREAT POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DYNAMISM. ANCIENT INDIA IS REVEALED IN ALL ITS FASCINATING, AND SOMETIMES CONTRADICTORY, COMPLEXITY IN THIS VOLUME'S LONG HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC ITINERARY, ACCOMPANIED BY A RICH ARRAY OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

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